MARY WEBB and the MOTHER SOCIETY

A. L. VAIL

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AND

THE MOTHER SOCIETY

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MARY WEBB

AND

THE MOTHER SOCIETY

BY

ALBERT L. VAIL

Author

"The Morning Hour of American Baptist Missions"
"Baptists Mobilized for Missions"
"Stewardship Among Baptists," etc.

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APOLOGY AND FORECAST

God moves through the ages on noiseless feet. He, indeed, sometimes treads thunderously, so that the earth shakes at his going forth; and among his stormy voices are strong men, leaders of the forum and the field, whose eloquence and gallantry are the custodians of destiny. But it is his gracious pleasure very often to work through those whispering ministers who shrink from the public arena and toil aside from the tornado's path.

The purpose of this publication is to rescue from an oblivion, almost as complete as it is undeserved, the name of one of those humble and suffering little ones who wrought greatly on foundations, and whose strong will and high character dwelt in an exceptionally hampered body and amid lowly conditions. Her lot was with a people then of but small renown among the eminent of the earth, and even there she was a little one. But it is conservatively proposed, a proposal whose justification may appear in the following pages, that she holds a place without a peer as pioneer in the realm of

arousing, organizing, and unifying women and children in America for missionary and charitable enterprises. Rev. Edward G. Porter, a highly esteemed Congregationalist, in his volume entitled "Rambles in Old Boston," 1887, mentions her as "a woman of rare character and great practical benevolence, although of humble means and a helpless cripple, who, by the energy of her will and the promptings of her heart, was able to do a charitable work among the poor which is deserving of high praise. Before the development of our city missionary societies, our Sunday-schools, and the organized charities of the present day, Mary Webb was a society in herself, devising plans and executing them with surprising facility; and the enterprises which she began in feebleness grew to large proportions by the generous support of the Christian public."

Readers may be induced into closer sympathy with the author's appreciation of his subject by a glimpse into the process by which he came to the present writing. He had long known, what is commonly reported, that in 1800 a few women, Congregationalists and Baptists, founded in Boston the first woman's missionary society in the world, and he shared the general impression that it was only a

collecting agency in aid of the more general organizations of the denominations with which those women were associated. In his search for the sources of the earlier missionary movements among American Baptists, he discovered that Mary Webb held a precedent and prominent place in relation to the receipts of the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society, and that she appeared to be the author of several addresses issued by the original woman's Society; and chiefly that those addresses and the correspondence clustering around them constituted the most significant feature, historically, of the Society, which itself directly, however, took on in other particulars more significance than had ever been recognized in any general way. That the suggestions of these things appeared in the Baptist literature and nowhere else, together with some other indications, made him morally certain that Miss Webb was a Baptist before he had any definite information on that point. This opening information took on accumulating significance in relation to the larger study he was prosecuting, and he therefore set out to learn all he could about her. Thenceforth, personally in Boston and variously through correspondence, particularly with a group of sympathetic women whose memories went back to Miss

Webb or some of her associates, he gathered the materials on which the tribute following is based, and which to some extent are incorporated in it. Since at least one of these helpful assistants has requested that her name be not mentioned in this connection, and none has intimated a disposition to be so recognized, they are used and thanked anonymously. (With like inadequate recognition, the author is constrained to leave others who kindly and efficiently aided him.)

One of these ladies writes, "We are a little too late." That is indeed true in some measure; this work should have been done fifty years ago, and was done partly in a fragmentary and ephemeral way; but we are not altogether too late, and such tribute as we are able to bring is gladly brought as a chaplet for a humble but wise and brave brow, and for the heartening of the like-minded, especially among women.

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I

MARY WEBB

Mary Webb was born March 12, 1779, in Boston, Mass. The precise location of her birthplace is given in an article in the "Watchman" of August 29, 1862, of which Dr. Baron Stow, long her pastor, was almost certainly the author. He locates it in Newberry Street, "since a part of Washington, near where the Liberty Tree Block now stands, opposite the Boylston Market." But since this was written the locality has so changed that the information is of but little value. The place was on what is now Washington Street, not far from either Faneuil Hall or Copp's Hill.

Mary's father was Samuel Webb, of whom we know only that he was a bookbinder. Her mother's name was Margaret, a member of the Old South Congregational Church. Of other members of the family we are not informed except an elder sister, Sally, with whom Mary's home was established after the death of her parents.

Mary's physical appearance in early life is left to inference from slight references to the same in later life. She was small in stature and probably frail physically before the great affliction fell on

her. This came when she was a little past five years of age. A "severe sickness," of which we learn nothing particularly, so "disabled her lower limbs" that afterward, through more than three-fourths of a century, she could neither walk nor stand. For seventy-seven eager years her locomotion was wholly on wheels or in human arms. What she accomplished would have been great for one woman of physical vigor and free movement; and for her, with these physical limitations but slightly relieved by financial resources, it seems to take on aspects of mental superiority and moral grandeur.

When Mary was thirteen years old, 1792, her father passed away, leaving presumably but small means of maintenance for his family. It is safe to assume that the widow and her daughters were confronted with the necessity of self-support, partly at least. An undated scrap of paper in Mary's writing states that for a considerable time she and her mother conducted a school, apparently in their own home. But prior to this the family removed to Hartford, or possibly only went there on a visit to relatives. Of this absence from Boston nothing now seems to be known except touching Mary's religious life, as will be noticed later. After the return from Hartford, the daughter lived with her mother until the decease of the latter, in December, 1813, after which she went to the home of her sister, Sally, Mrs. Edward Hartt, 24-26 Hull

Street; and after the death of Mr. Hartt, in 1823, the sisters continued the home. Mr. Hartt was an enterprising boat-builder, his business being extensively on the Western rivers, and his life closed in Kentucky.

THE RELIGIOUS GIRL

When Doctor Stow wrote his article in memory of Miss Webb he had her diary, and what we record concerning her early experience is from that source. The limits of the space at his disposal compelled great compression. We have no information of the dimensions of the diary or of the dates at which it was begun and closed, but evidently it began quite early.

The first note of religious concern relates an experience when its author was two years old. In the second paragraph of the diary she wrote: "The first thing I remember I took a pleasure in doing *because* I knew it was wrong, was playing on a Lord's Day." Her view of the source and quality of this conduct is expressed in these words: "My little depraved heart was gratified in doing it *on that very account.*" At six years of age "her mind was deeply affected by her sense of sinfulness, and while reflecting on the fall of man, she 'wished that Adam had not sinned, and thus entailed so much misery on his posterity.'" This is the only glimpse given us of the working of her mind on religious subjects until she came under a new influence seven years later.

Through what channel these earlier impressions reached her we do not know, except her mother. Mrs. Webb is reported to have been a positively religious character, and faithful to her daughter in religious instruction according to the standards of Congregationalism in Boston at that time. That was before the Sunday-school, and when presumably those serious views of life and respect for the church and authority which characterized the orthodoxy of early New England Congregationalists were still supreme in that home. We may safely imagine the frail little cripple, with the "little depraved heart," and the busy, sober head, trained strictly by her mother in the special intimacy between them, which the helplessness of the one and the sympathy of the other would induce.

When she was about thirteen a new and mighty influence flowed into her life and never ceased to mold it. It was the influence of Thomas Baldwin, pastor of the Second Baptist Church. Near Mary's home its meeting-house stood, in the center of the block, its front door reached from Salem Street through a narrower way. On this the pastor lived; for him it was later named, and the name of the church, following that of the "Place" by which it was approached, became "Baldwin Place." We use this name from this time, though not always accurate chronologically. Mr. Baldwin became pastor of this church in 1790. His coming ushered in a new era for it, inaugurated by a powerful work of the

Spirit, flowing on into substantial edification through many years. More than usually, the dignity of the teacher and the gentleness of the shepherd united in him. About two years after he became a neighbor of the Webbs, Mr. Webb died. No indication appears of intimacy or even acquaintance between these neighbors prior to this event. But about that time the pastor found the home, and between the strong man and the frail girl a friendship arose which grew with the years. Doctor Stow states that she "was much impressed by conversation which he had with her on personal religion." The affliction of the family may have drawn him to its threshold, and the younger daughter's prostrate body and precocious mind combined to stir toward her the good man's natural sympathy and spiritual solicitude.

In 1793 the family went to Hartford where, through association with Baptists, Mary "was led to examine the word of God with reference to their distinctive principles." As a result she was not only convinced of their soundness, but also became troubled about her own spiritual state, and "after a season of deep distress, in view of her lost condition," she found peace and joy. Doctor Stow adds: "Her own account of the work of the Spirit in her heart is deeply interesting."

After about a year in Hartford, Mrs. Webb and her daughters returned to Boston, and Mary seems to have begun to attend the Baptist church. Whether she was joined in this by either of the

other members of the family does not appear, but probably she was by her sister, who also became a member of Baldwin Place. The Baptist meeting was much more accessible than the other, especially for the one who must be wheeled everywhere. But the new convictions that had come to Mary, and perhaps to Sally, would doubtless have taken them there without regard to convenience. "In her diary of that period, she mentioned in strong terms the pleasure and profit she derived from the visits of 'Pastor Baldwin,' and reckoned among her 'most useful and pleasant associates,' two pious young men of about her own age, Heman and Ensign Lincoln." These young men, who were cousins, united with Baldwin Place about the same time that Mary did, and became not only active helpers in her good works, but very valuable and widely known in the larger affairs of the denomination.

THE PORTAL OF FELLOWSHIP

Turning now from Doctor Stow's article to the church records, we come to the story of Mary's baptism and union with the church. These records reveal the item that when she was twenty years of age she was so commonly called Polly that this name is used in the first, and some subsequent, references to her in the church book. She always appears as "Polly Webb," in connection with her reception and a little beyond, then she becomes

always "Mary Webb." The nickname, Polly, I find nowhere else applied to her. That it went into these records in this form, seems clearly to indicate that at that time it was common; and we may indulge the fancy that it in some measure voiced the tender sentiment of the community toward the frail and helpless, but bright and brave girl.

In these records, under date of March 26, 1798, we find that the church "conferred on a proposition of Polly Webb's to join the church, and several other matters." The meaning beneath this conference on Polly's proposition, and the fact that it was not acted on until a month later, is that it involved a course that the church had never taken, so far as the records show, and never repeated, as a search of the same authority through a series of subsequent years shows. Possibly in some yet later year something of this kind was done; but in those earlier times the instance of Polly Webb stands alone as the occasion of a business meeting at a private house to accommodate an applicant for membership, or for any other purpose. The record does not state this as the point under consideration, but the next succeeding entry seems to show that it was: "April 29. Agreed to meet, on Friday evening next, at Mrs. Webb's to hear the relation of Miss Polly Webb, who wishes to offer herself as a candidate for baptism." This business is finished in the record by the two entries here following:

"Friday evening, May 4, met at Mrs. Webb's, opened by prayer. Then proceeded to hear the relation of Miss Polly Webb with regard to God's gracious dealing with her, after which the church unanimously gave her fellowship and received her as a candidate for baptism. Dismissed by prayer and singing"; and this in conclusion, "July 1, 1798, Polly Webb was baptized and received into the church the same day."

If we should seek for a reason for this deviation from the custom of the church to hear such relations in the more public way, we would probably find it correctly in the fact that the applicant shrank from the ordeal of being wheeled into the meeting at the meeting-house and relating her experience there, whether seated in her vehicle or not. The reception of members by Baptists then was a much more searching process than it is usually now; and this strictness began in the experience on which the applicant was accepted. It may be well doubted whether any one would have been received by that church when Mary Webb came in, on such experience as that on which most of our applicants are now welcomed. Our present views of sin and salvation are superficial as compared with those of that time, and our experiences of grace are correspondingly shallow and ashamed.

And now if, guided by imagination in small part, we enter the Baldwin Place meeting-house for the morning meeting of the Lord's Day, July 1, 1798,

we will see the baptistery open "near the head of the broad aisle," "where it continued in use more than forty years," having been enlarged twice, once in 1788, and again in 1797, the year before this occasion. As we wait amid the serious congregation, stirred doubtless to more than its accustomed interest at baptisms, partly by the peculiar incidents in connection with the reception of the present subject, and more by tender sympathy with the delicate girl, known and loved by all, and possibly by the knowledge that her shrinking from the ordeal has held back her application—as we wait the pastor and a deacon descend into the liquid grave, bearing a helpless form which might be mistaken for that of a child, but is in fact that of a person of nineteen, whom her pastor of a later date characterized as a woman of "great mental energy." Doctor Stow says of an effect of the event, "Her joy was great," and quotes from her writing of the occasion: "The ordinance was made so exceedingly sweet and precious to me that I thought on the next Lord's Day morning I should have delighted to go again."

THE FAITHFUL CHURCH-MEMBER

Coming from the church associations of her mother, over what protests, if any, we can only conjecture and making her public confession in a way so peculiarly difficult and trying Miss Webb gave promise of steadfastness in her church relations and

diligence in maintaining them. This promise was kept abundantly. With but meager materials, we are still clearly informed of this in two particulars—attendance and discipline.

Attendance. As to her attendance on the regular services of the church, Doctor Stow, who was her pastor for sixteen years says: "The manner in which she overcame difficulties in reaching the meetings made her an example that often rebuked the wealthier but less conscientious members." He also states that she labored in all departments of Christian activity contributing readily to all church and denominational enterprises. Her relation to the first Sunday-school in the church will be considered in another connection. As we proceed we will see her projecting her earnest life into so many missionary and charitable channels beyond her own church and denomination that we may be in danger of thinking of her as slack in denominational conviction and church devotion; but such thought would falsify her. Through the more than sixty years that she was a member of Baldwin Place her fidelity never flagged.

An aged lady remembers that "the pew in which Miss Webb was placed on the Sabbath was always filled between the services [forenoon and afternoon] by friends who went there to chat with her." Another correspondent writes: "I have heard my mother tell of her and other children's interest in watching for Miss Webb's chair to be rolled up the

aisle to the pulpit stairs." Another, in seeking material toward this work, "called upon an old gentleman who, when he was young, used to assist each Sabbath in carrying the little carriage up to the pew, and of course often chatted for a while; but fifty years is a long while for any of us older people, who are not now so strong in our memories as in the days of yore, to carry words, though we know they were full of love and wisdom." And another eighty-six years of age writes: "All I remember of Miss Webb was seeing her brought into Baldwin Place Church in a small carriage by a man. I think it was a miniature of a larger carriage, covered top. I think she was quite heavy, of course looked short." Still another reports her interest when a little girl in watching Miss Webb's carriage coming down Salem Street, and the eagerness of the young men waiting at the door to carry her in. And one more tells us: "I went once with my grandmother when I was a little girl, to see the little old lady crouched in her wheel-chair, who had been the means, though so feeble and afflicted, of starting many of the most philanthropic, and body and soul-saving societies, in Boston." From all these we learn that she was borne in her carriage or chair (perhaps at one period a "miniature carriage," and at another period a chair similar to those now in such use), wheeled or carried by a man to her seat and placed in it, after which the conveyance stood by the pulpit stairs. And this was the regular order while two genera-

tions of young men, competing for the privilege, grew into old men.

Discipline. After Miss Webb's baptism no reference to her appears in the church records for about a year and a half, when this entry comes into view, for Monday evening, December 30, 1799: "The church met at the meeting-house, but as the evening was wet under foot the meeting was thin. Opened by prayer. Read a letter from Miss P. Webb. Conversed on several things relative to the peace of the church, but transacted no business of importance." This scrappy record is suggestive. At that time women were but little known in the business of the church, and a letter from a woman of the church was doubtless a rare affair, though quite likely if she had expected to be present her communication would have been in this form, but she may have been absent on account of the wet winter night, if for no other reason. What this letter was about is left to conjecture, but it may safely be assumed to relate to some interest of the body, and the immediately following statement that the informal discussion related to the peace of the church, suggests that that was its subject. The church was then much more a family than now. Its business was largely devoted to the conduct of the members, particularly toward each other, and presumably the letter from "Miss P. Webb" led to the conversation.

But our little friend was not long in bringing

forward a case of discipline clearly her own. She herself got into trouble, and appealed to the church to help her out. The case as it rambles through the records is semicomical, and may also deserve a moment of our attention here because of the light it throws on methods of discipline then as well as on the character of Mary Webb. It is so far away from the entry just passed that we could confidently assume it not to be the same, if we were less acquainted with the dilatory progress of church business in those times; and perhaps it is safe anyway to make that assumption. We need to remember that, at the date now reached in the records, Miss Webb had considerably advanced in those philanthropic enterprises in which her genius shone, and into that high place in the esteem of the church and the community that might have made it easy and excusable for her to disregard her duty to a troublesome sister and go on her way in silence. It was on July 4, 1806, that in church meeting "a letter from Mary Webb [no longer Polly] was read, stating that a difficulty subsisted between her and Mrs. '———,' that she had taken the first and second steps, and wished the church to attend to it." A deacon on the committee died before the close of the month and a successor was named "to visit Mary Webb and '———,' who have had some misunderstanding with each other." But up to December fifth the committee seems to have neglected its duty, for then it was

requested "to attend to the business, so as to report at the next church meeting." But nearly two years pass before this affair appears again, when, "after some remarks by Brother Oliver, one of the committee, it was proposed that they wait upon the parties once more, and that Deacon Rainsford be joined to the committee, which was voted." Evidently something had been doing, but it had not reached a satisfactory conclusion. And that is the last of it in the records. But some five years later, others arraigned before the church a woman of the same family name, but whose first name is not given in the second instance. Labor was undertaken, but dragged. The committee was curiously slow to get at business, until finally the disclosure was made that the culprit's husband had objected to the committee visiting her. The upshot was her appearance in the church meeting, where she spoke in a way that put an end to her career there. She acknowledged her bad temper, exhibiting a sample of it that distressed the maker of the record, and claimed that it was given to her for self-defense, thus justifying herself in the use of it. Thereupon she was excluded.

These two disturbers were probably one, and she was a terror. An easy inference is that her sharp tongue had cruelly cut the sensitive saint going about on errands of mercy, who did not shirk her duty to a sister in the church, but having taken the steps prescribed by the Master, left her vindication

with the church. In this view of it, the incident reveals a sidelight on her character.

A glimpse given us by Doctor Stow, showing Miss Webb as a watcher for souls in personal relations, may close this study of her fidelity as a church-member. His statement, seeming designed to cover her whole life, is that, "for her family connections and many others," she felt "tender solicitude," and "led some of them to Christ for salvation." And here we leave our subject in her more private life and local relationships, to return to her in some of these aspects many years later, after she had become a "shut-in," while we proceed to seek her acquaintance in affairs of wider reach.

Perhaps we may profitably get a clearer impression at this point of her as a voluntary and effective charity worker. Or, if our impression is clear, a reminder may not be amiss before we proceed. Mr. Porter, as already quoted, seems to mean that Miss Webb had begun to be "a society in herself" earlier than this, possibly earlier than her union with the church. She sought out the suffering poor, and solicited means for their relief personally "before the development of our city missionary societies, our Sunday-schools, and the organized charities of the present day." She devised plans for this purpose and executed them "with surprising facility." Her "great mental energy," and other natural endowments to this end, were no

doubt much aided by her physical helplessness and her financial limitations. Her weakness for this work reenforced her appeals to others. If we are to appreciate properly her character in originating and operating organizations, we must first realize her as a rare individual worker in these fields before organizations, and perhaps before she reached womanhood.

THE MISSIONARY LEADER

When Miss Webb united with the Baptist church the first missionary society in New England had not been organized. The same was true throughout the country, except for a few undenominational societies, led by that in New York in 1796. Of these she probably knew nothing. Her acquaintance with Christian activities up to that time had presumably been limited to what she saw among the Congregationalists and Baptists in Boston. In both these fellowships the missionary mind had expressed itself limitedly in various ways, individual and local. A difference between these two parties was that, in a general way, the Congregationalists were losing that soundness in the faith and zeal in religion that had formerly characterized them, while the Baptists were more steadfast on the fundamentals and more zealous in evangelism, their missionary endeavor, after the individual, having been expressed through churches and Associations.

In 1799, within a year after the baptism of Mary

Webb, the agitation for a missionary society among the Congregationalists in Boston and vicinity resulted in the origin of "The Massachusetts Missionary Society." This action was opposed by the less orthodox leaders in the denomination on the ground that no such organization was needed there, Massachusetts being already Christian. Partly as a concession to this sentiment, the purpose of the Society was declared to be to operate where Christ was not preached; and one of the leaders in the movement commented on this clause, that it included Boston because Christ was not preached there. To a very serious extent that was true in the Congregational churches in which the Universalist-Unitarian element had become strong. In fact, the rising tide of heterodoxy among themselves was one of the sources of the desire of the sounder element to inaugurate the missionary movement; and thence onward the defenders of the faith and the promoters of missions were the same.

Dr. Nathanael Emmons, of Franklin, Mass., was the first president of this Society. He was a preacher of marked ability, known chiefly as a great theologian, of inflexible logic, whose sermons are probably regarded as dry doctrinal essays, and himself as lacking in sympathy and evangelistic zeal. But the choice of him as the chief officer of the missionary Society was not a mistake. As the President of the Society he preached its first annual sermon in May, 1800. This sermon comes into our

story significantly, because it was the flint that struck fire in the mind of Mary Webb and started the flame of what she called her "passion for missions" that steadily burned for sixty years.

Preliminary to the consideration of the effect of the sermon on the young woman's mind, we should pause long enough to catch a glimpse of the preparation for this effect. Doctor Baldwin, who had been her pastor for two years and her spiritual guide longer, was the leading force in the missionary movement among the Baptists in that vicinity, and second to none throughout the denomination in that interest, from that time onward for a quarter of a century. That Miss Webb had imbibed from him sentiments and sympathies predisposing her to respond as she did to the sermon of Doctor Emmons, may be regarded as certain. The Baptist mind of that date had been affected beyond any other in America by the foreign mission movement in England, and nowhere had that influence found a more open field than in the Baldwin Place Church in Boston. It was the central source of the streams that emerged two years later in the "Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society." With her predisposition to philanthropy, under the guidance of Pastor Baldwin, Miss Webb's response to Doctor Emmons' sermon was natural. On this point Doctor Stow makes a statement, quoting a remark of Miss Webb, as follows: "In the summer of 1800, reading a sermon of Doctor Emmons, she

'first conceived a *passion* for missions,' and immediately set herself at work with both tongue and pen to awaken in others a similar interest." But before we proceed to particulars about the result of her awakening, we may well pause to make the acquaintance of the sermon itself, which, fortunately, is preserved in the pamphlet form in which the receptive reader first saw it. It is well worth reading, not only for its own sake, but particularly now for the light it sheds on the mind and heart of Miss Webb. It shows the kind of discourse that most effectively reached her understanding and most powerfully moved her will.

"Sermon before the Massachusetts Missionary Society, at their annual meeting in Boston, May 27, 1800. By Nathanael Emmons, D. D."

2 Chronicles 15: 7: "Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded."

The sermon opens with a statement of the situation of Israel at the time the text was spoken, by way of which the preacher reaches his theme: "The friends of God have good ground for unshaken resolution in promoting the cause of religion."

I. "Necessity of resolution in promoting the cause of religion." Resolution is necessary in all "great things." True in religion. Illustrated from the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Reformers.

II. "The friends of God have good ground for such unshaken resolution in promoting such a great and good design."

1. "They have often succeeded in their sincere attempts to promote his glory in the conversion of sinners." Illustrations from the Bible and modern times. "There is something extremely animating in the prospect of success. It always inspires the mind with irresistible zeal and fortitude in seeking a desirable object. This alluring motive God, in his providence, holds up to the view of his friends, who are sincerely engaged to promote his cause."

2. "The promotion of religion is such a noble and laudable design that it is even glorious to fail in the attempt." Failures are common to mankind and to the friends of God. "But in all cases, in which the failure has not been owing either to negligence or the unfaithfulness or the despondency of those employed in concerting and executing the design, their attempt has always met with general approbation and applause." After illustrations comes the injunction to consider that there is "nothing to lose, but much to gain by most zealous and bold attempts."

3. "They have reason to expect the peculiar presence and assistance of God." His cause enlists his heart, and he enlists every creature and directs every event in the universe for its attainment, and gives express promises. Having noted examples, the author proceeds: "Such peculiar promises of

divine support, protection, and assistance apply to all those who are heartily engaged to spread the knowledge and blessings of the gospel among the perishing children of men, and are designed to inspire them with resolution and zeal in the great undertaking."

4. "Their benevolent desires and exertions will be . . . attended with the approbation and prayers of all good men. . . Here the distinction of different denominations ceases to operate, and admits an entire union in sentiment and feeling."

5. "They are equally sure of the esteem and affection of all those whom they shall be instrumental in converting. This consideration may well support and animate them in suffering all the reproach and suffering they may meet with."

6. "All the sincere endeavors and extraordinary exertions in favor of religion shall finally meet a glorious recompense of reward." God has promised it. What better use can be made of the blessings of providence? "This is the most important design carrying on in the world, and even in any part of the universe; and, therefore, to be instrumental in promoting this, is to do the greatest good which lies in the power of man to do." Illustrations. "These promises . . . ought to animate good men at this day as they animated Moses, the prophets, the apostles, and even Christ himself, to the most bold and vigorous exertions in the cause of religion."

Thus is opened the way for "Improvements"

and "Applications." "The friends of God *have been very negligent*." If they had been diligent the state of the world would have been very different. Having expanded this thought, the preacher proceeds: "Nothing has been wanting, since the revival of learning, the invention of printing, and the discovery of the magnet to prevent the universal spread of the gospel, but merely Christian resolution and zeal"; and having urged that this fact calls for humiliation, he adds that "the present melancholy state of Christianity throughout the world reproaches all its friends for their past irresolution and negligence."

"None will ever do much to forward the work without a large share of Christian zeal and resolution." Piety and good will are worthless or worse, "if destitute of a truly missionary spirit." This means beginning at home, personally and nationally. The heart must "glow with love to God and a tender concern for the souls of men, must be weaned from the world, stripped of mercenary motives, willing to deny self and take up the cross," before the possession of the necessary spirit.

"It is not yet too late to attempt the propagation of the gospel throughout this extended country . . . though the enemies of religion have within a few years greatly increased in numbers and strength, though they have set every engine in motion to spread error, deism, and even atheism, through every corner of our land. . . If the few friends of

God in this country, therefore, were only awake, united, and possessed of proper zeal and fortitude," they might check "vice and infidelity," and extend the Redeemer's kingdom "where Satan is now reigning without control." "God arises to defend his cause in discouraging times. He is so doing now throughout the world." Here follows a survey in brief, in which the preacher raises and refutes in few words some possible objections, proceeding: "The United States are abundantly able, in respect to numbers and wealth, to spread the gospel through all North and South America. And we were, there is reason to believe, raised up and formed into a civil and religious community to perform this service for God, in grateful return for his distinguishing and protecting mercy."

"But let us turn from the dark to the bright side of the work. What if the set time to favor Zion should be at hand? What if there should be a general effusion of the divine Spirit upon all our religious societies? What if the attention of both ministers and people should be awakened to the object we are pursuing, and they should, like the men of Israel, fall in to our assistance in abundance? What if the numerous inhabitants of the new settlements should generally be formed into large and flourishing churches? What if the poor heathen [Indians] should have an opportunity and a heart to embrace the gospel? In a word, what if this whole continent should be both civilized and gospel-

ized, through the instrumentality of this and other missionary societies? Who would not have reason to rejoice? And who would have more reason to rejoice than those who were the most sincere, active, bold, and zealous in bringing about such happy event? These are not imaginary prospects. If God intends to make us a *happy,* he will make us a *holy* people; and if he intends to make us a *holy* people, he will employ the proper means to effect his purpose. Let us, then, my brethren, take courage; let our hearts and hands be strong; for there are certainly prospects within our view, which, whether realized before or after we are laid in the dust, will abundantly reward us for all that we can do to build up the kingdom of our DIVINE REDEEMER."

II

THE BOSTON FEMALE SOCIETY FOR MISSIONARY PURPOSES

The available materials for a history of this Society fall into four divisions or periods. This analysis strictly taken is neither accurate nor complete. But it seems to yield itself as easily as any other to the present purpose, and possibly more easily than any other. The four periods may be named *the germinal, the expansive, the Boston,* and *the Baptist.*

THE GERMINAL PERIOD
1800-1802

The germinal process in the mind and character of the founder of the Society has been already traced. We come now to the germination of the Society itself in that group of minds among whom hers was central and primary. This proceeds through several stages.

Consultation. Mary Webb read the sermon of Doctor Emmons in the summer of 1800. Its seed, falling into prepared soil, began at once to germinate. It produced what she called her "passion for missions." In her fortieth annual report to

the Society she refers to this sermon as the means by which "a flame was kindled up in the bosom of an individual, which resulted in the organization of the Society now present." How her mind worked in details we do not know, but something is revealed in the same report, where she says: "When the subject was proposed to the consideration of friends, it instantly met the cordial approval of some, while others smiled or stood aloof. But with the hearty approval of several judicious ministers and brethren "the organization was effected." In seeking to identify these "ministers and brethren" we get a little light from the same source. In close connection with the preceding quotation, she tells the story of the origin of the "Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society," which arose on the application of a young men's meeting or society in the Baldwin Place Baptist Church, which was presented to the pastor, Dr. Thomas Baldwin, "in the winter of 1802." The young men had been sustaining this meeting for religious purposes, and at that time were so much impressed with their duty to push out into wider activity that they went to their pastor with their burden, expressing to him their conviction that the time was ripe for the Baptists to start a missionary society. He replied that he had been thinking the same thing and would confer about it with "Brother Stillman," pastor of the First Baptist Church, and see what could be done. Thence resulted the Baptist Society in the May fol-

lowing. That Miss Webb placed this account of the meeting of the young men and its awakening to a larger duty, in connection with the origin of her own Society, seems to show that she was thinking of a close connection between the two, which indicates the conclusion that these young men in the Baldwin Place Church were prominent in her memory of her advisers at that time. This conclusion is confirmed by her reference, in her report for 1833, to the then recent decease of Mr. Ensign Lincoln, to which special reference was made. Of him she said: "Mr. L. was a warm friend of this Society from its commencement. He was among the first gentlemen whose opinions were consulted with reference to its formation, and although at that time but a youth, he was then, what he ever afterward continued to be, a *prudent counselor*." In her fortieth annual report, where she speaks of the devotional union of the women of the two denominations, she says: "This delightful union, taking place as it did when there were but two Baptist churches in Boston, and not more than one Congregational church that stood fully upon evangelical grounds, proved, as it were, a little central point, around which devout women clustered in holy concert to pray for the enlargement of Zion." All these items together warrant us in saying that in Boston then were only three pastors whom she would consult—two Baptist and one Congregationalist. If she consulted any others, they were in adjacent country

churches. The other men consulted were no doubt most of them in her own church, officers and others, especially those earnest and judicious young men with whom she was most intimate. She says that Doctor Baldwin encouraged the woman's Society when he knew that all of its funds for a while would go to the aid of another denomination. This seems to have been true of all the Baptist men whom she consulted.

In the light that we have accumulated, we can readily imagine with considerable confidence the process at this juncture. We imagine that when Miss Webb finished reading the sermon, with its closing appeal ringing in her soul, her alert mind sprang to the conclusion that she must do something toward the end to which it pointed, and that her bold will resolved and her practical ingenuity began to devise. The best place seeming to her to get hold practically was with the Society that had sent out the sermon, the only organization of that character then existing in New England. Her relations were intimate with some members in both denominations. Why might she not unite some of her friends, especially the young, in gathering funds for the aid of the Congregational Society, at least until the Baptists opened the way for such aid by a similar organization? It was not in her to proceed far in such a course without conference with her pastor. She was blazing a path, perilous for a young woman, through an unbroken wilderness, and

she had no spirit of revolt against the prevalent views among Christians concerning the sphere of woman. It is morally certain that if Doctor Baldwin had discouraged the proposal on the ground of impropriety, that Society would not have begun in 1800. But he did not object. On the contrary, he approved heartily and supported his approval practically in every available way. He saw in this little cloud one of the sources of that larger missionary rain for which he was looking.

Constitution. Who wrote the constitution? No answer comes except from probability and internal evidence. The probability is that Miss Webb carried the problem of a constitution to her pastor, as well as that she examined the constitution of the only missionary Society of which she then had any definite knowledge, probably, and to which she had access. These two sources were open to her for suggestions, and she presumably utilized them. Some terms in this document are very similar to the corresponding terms in the coordinate document of the Baptist Society soon following. These terms, if nothing more, are naturally traceable, directly or indirectly, to Doctor Baldwin. But his modes of thought and expression in this field were familiar to his devoted parishioner, and she may have used them here unconscious of their likeness to the way that her pastor expressed the same ideas. Or it is not incredible that some of it was literally written by the sympathetic pastor. But much of it reminds

us of the way in which the like thoughts are expressed in those addresses and reports known to have been written by Miss Webb. Without going into details on the internal evidence, we have some confidence in our opinion that this constitution was substantially the joint product of Mary Webb and Thomas Baldwin.

Two issues of it are available, one printed in 1809 and the other in 1816. The first of these may be seen in the volume entitled, "Woman's Missionary Societies," by Mrs. L. H. Daggett, Boston, 1879. The second was printed by Nathanael Willis, in Boston, and seems not to have been ever reproduced. Whether the one of 1809 was identical with the original, which was printed gratuitously by the Society's good friend, Ensign Lincoln, is not known, though probably it was or nearly so; but a comparison of the copies of 1809 and of 1816 shows that the latter was a revision of the former. The changes are not important unless two of them may be so construed. One of these is the insertion of a relatively long reference to the success of missions to date, as a justification and encouragement of this Society. The other is a declaration of its purpose as being "foreign and domestic." It had begun as what we call a home mission society, devoted to our own country in the larger sense; the opening of Asia to missions had drawn its activities in contributions to that work; and now it was about to find its chief field in Boston "city missions," but

not necessarily its exclusive field. All this is put into the phrase "foreign and domestic," recording the past and opening the way to the developments of the future.

The preamble of the 1809 constitution, almost certainly the same as the original, was as follows: "Animated by the noble exertions which are making in the various parts of the Christian world, to spread the knowledge of divine truth, and by the success which the great Head of the church has seen fit, in many instances, to crown the united endeavors of his dear people, a number of females, feeling interested in the glorious cause, and desirous of promoting it, have formed themselves into a Society to collect a sum for the express purpose of aiding missions. The destitute and afflicting situation of thousands of our fellow creatures calls aloud to charity; and while a needle can be instrumental of spreading the knowledge of a Saviour's name, shall a Christian female forbear to exercise it in the best of causes? No, in imitation of those who ministered to the necessities of our divine Lord, we will offer our mite to the relief of his elect body. [Here the 1816 issue added the references to success.] With the view to promote the objects of the Society, the following articles are adopted for its regulation."

Summarizing the thirteen articles we get this: The Society to consist of any number of females disposed to contribute to its purpose; to meet on

the first Monday afternoon in every month; two dollars required annually from each member, with liberty to contribute more for those able and willing; opportunity open to non-members to contribute with or without solicitation; separate lists of Baptists and Congregationalists to be kept, and the contributions of members to be distributed denominationally as the donors desire; additional condition of membership, "good moral character and right views and motives"; any member to introduce new members, through the Secretary, on evidence of their fitness; membership continuous "until circumstances occur to render it inexpedient"; any member failing "to exhibit the character required" to be excluded by a majority present; annual choice of a secretary and treasurer; meetings to be at the homes of the members, for the sake of economy, on invitation from meeting to meeting, invitations and acceptances to be free without offense; "the time not occupied by the business of the Society shall be devoted to religious exercises." (One item not mentioned in the constitution, but understood from the first, was that the specific method of missionary procedure was to be the distribution of Bibles, Testaments, and other religious books through the missionaries of the general societies. We will see that soon and increasingly this good literature element, though having the whole field at first, gave way to others, and the anticipation of such change probably caused the omission of mention of the

field of operations which at the beginning was the only one, practically.)

Organization. The Society was organized in the residence of Mrs. Webb, with whom Mary lived, October 9, 1800, the founders being eight Baptists and six Congregationalists. The membership fee was two dollars, as was also the annual requirement for the continuance of membership. This set the financial standard at the highest point known at that time and for a decade or more subsequently. It was the same as that of the Congregational Society instituted in Boston a year earlier, and as high as any of the few union societies then in existence in America. When the Massachusetts Baptist Society arrived, eighteen months later, its standard was one dollar; while half a dollar was the amount required in the earlier Baptist woman's organizations; and the "Cent Institute," which soon arose among the Congregational women, took its name from its basis of one cent a week. This made this pioneer woman's Society quite a financial aristocracy. Probably this reduced the number of its founders, for two dollars was a considerable sum in the sight of many women then. If a more modest money condition had been made, more members might have been secured at the beginning, especially among the Baptists, who doubtless averaged lower in financial ability than the Congregationalists, and were less accustomed to taxation, or anything looking like it, in religion than the others were.

Life-memberships come into view later, on a basis of twenty dollars, but when they originated does not appear. Also life-directors are known to have been a feature quite early, but their details are obscure, and presumably they were related to the life-memberships. An item in the annual report of 1825 shows that very young girls were eligible to life-membership. It is in the obituary part of the report. Reference is there made to efficient workers gone hence, particularly Mrs. Larkin and Miss Lincoln, both on the Board of Directors and distinguished for philanthropic activity. In this connection the Secretary wrote: "And should the cold-hearted professor, whose attention is engrossed with business and parade, ask the departed spirit of Elizabeth Lincoln if she now regretted having spent so many hours in the Alms House, conversing with its miserable tenants on the glories of the world she now inhabits, probably she would say, 'Go thou and do likewise.' We have before us this afternoon a living testimony of the attachment of the latter to the cause of Christ. At her request, a sister and five little nieces are made life-members of this Society. May her much-coveted mantle rest on them." In the same connection, when expressing pleasure at the coming of new members, she continues: "and among them we are happy to recognize a number of our juvenile friends. May these youthful, we may almost say infant, members rise up and more than fill the places of those who preceded

them." Some of these "almost infant members," possibly all of them, were presumably the nieces of Miss Lincoln, and the inference is suggested that the cost of their life-memberships had been provided by her.

It is not possible to learn much definitely about the founders. They were mostly young women, but not wholly so, and presumably were intimates of Miss Webb, whom she would first seek as associates in this enterprise and who would be the most ready to encourage her in it. They were well aware that it would encounter criticism as presumptuous and unbecoming in a company of young women, or older for that matter. They were sensitive to such criticism, but they were moved by a sober and courageous sense of duty. Of them Dr. Daniel Sharp said, at the fiftieth anniversary of the Society, when only Mary Webb and one other of them were present, "They were women who feared God more than men." The imagination may find an interesting field in that group of two sevens, the thirteen gathering about the crippled girl, who was also "a woman of great mental energy." In the twenty-fifth annual report the Secretary indulged in reminiscences which furnish some light on the points just mentioned. She wrote: "With much diffidence and many obstacles to encounter we commenced our career. . . To aid the cause of missions by permanent combination was a thing unprecedented among females. And as an association for this specific

purpose we stood alone for several years." The ages of the departed at their decease, as given in this connection, were from eighteen to seventy-eight years. This makes it certain that at least one of the founders was fifty-three years of age in 1800. May we not guess that Mary's mother was another, though not so old? And to guess again, that another, though still living in 1825, was her sister Sally, who in 1800, if not earlier, was a member of Baldwin Place, with her husband, to whom she was married on "Christmas Day, 1796," would probably be correct. Two additional persons of whom we are certain are Mrs. J. Parke and Miss Mary Doubt. The first of these was President for several years, and her decease is mentioned in this same report. The second, whose departure is recorded in the report of 1846, was the daughter of a "respectable physician," a very useful member, who if she had had the literary privileges "might have shone in almost any circle." She became a Baptist in 1789, and passed away in 1846, "at the advanced age of eighty-three years," "in the same habitation in which she was born and lived, with the exception of a short interval." This makes her age when she united in the founding to have been thirty-seven years. When we recall that in 1825 only four of these founders remained in the Society, and that the earlier reports now available are fragmentary, we see reason for the paucity of the information in this field. If all that the accurate and appreciative

Secretary doubtless recorded at some time had been preserved, this list might be enlarged.

Probably the only officers at first were president, secretary, and treasurer, though the original constitution seems not to have required the first of these. But with growth and more complexity of operations, additional officers were provided as needed. A list of them in 1825 gives president, three vice-presidents, secretary and treasurer in one, two assistants, and a committee of nine. The two assistants being listed next after the secretary-treasurer seem to have had close relation to her, while the committee of nine coming last may be understood as more general in their relations. From the same source we learn of five directors. None of the names of officers given are duplicated, but the names of the large committee, which are not given, might show duplications. The constitution of 1816 provides for a committee of fourteen, including the officers, to meet monthly to examine the correspondence and do other necessary business. All this indicates a practical adjustment to changing conditions from time to time. But amid all changes one abides at the center. Mary Webb was treasurer from beginning to end, forty-six years, and secretary for the same time except the first two years. The statement has been published that she was secretary also from the first. This seems to be an error. The natural course would have been to give one of these offices to each denomination, which appears to have been done.

But not later than the third year the two were brought together in the one person who was the chief spring of the whole movement. At first the treasurership was the working office, but as the correspondence grew the secretaryship became even more important. What this means will appear more clearly as we proceed.

For the first fourteen years the Society met at the homes of its members, afterward in the vestry of the Park Street Congregational Church until its division into two organizations in 1829. The earlier plan avowedly had economy in view. The change may have been made for greater convenience or better distribution of denominational honors.

Although the constitution mentions the needle as a source of income, or a form of service, in the original design, the monthly meetings were not sewing-circles for any purpose, but provision was imperative that all of the time after attending to the business should be given to devotional exercises. When and how the needle came in is not told. Other methods of securing funds and doing good are reported, but the needle in both connections is ignored. That it was used, at home probably, is incidentally involved in some statements, but directly or distinctly it appears nowhere in available records except in the constitution. Incidental assurances of it are in the "Fragment Society," in the "Priscilla Society," in the original

Society itself for the Indians in the West, and by the same women for the wardrobe of the Sunday-school, but never anywhere as a means of securing money.

THE EXPANSIVE PERIOD
1802-1816

The organization of the "Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society," May 26, 1802, unclasped the bond holding in one fund the contributions of all the members of the "Female Society," according to the original agreement. It turned the fund provided by the Baptist members into the treasury of the Baptist Society; but the organization, the name, the officers, and the worship, the whole fellowship, remained as at the first. The one treasurer handled all the receipts, but kept separate denominational accounts. This arrangement continued for fourteen years. Those years give name to the second period. It is called "expansive" because it witnessed the expansion of the operations of the Society. In the appropriation of funds the expansion was from one denominational home mission society into two, substantially the same in plan and field of operations. Closely following this, another expression was from home missions into foreign. A third expansion might be fairly recognized in the application of the women's funds, from the provision of literature for the use of missionaries to the whole compass of the work of the two denominational organizations.

For facts in this period we are dependent entirely on the " Baptist Missionary Magazine," which originated in 1803, and for several years appeared only quarterly or less frequently. Its space was quite limited and its contents were general as well as missionary. Consequently the women were necessarily restricted to very modest accommodations unless the editor granted them special favors. Neither denomination had a weekly, or more than a monthly, publication during this period. In the same general class of literature as the " Baptist Magazine " the Congregationalists were better supplied than the Baptists. But in these years their periodicals did not recognize the women in whom we are now interested. The earliest report of the Society, except those in periodical literature, that this writer has seen, is that of 1817. It was found in the Athenaeum Library, Boston. When the first printed report, in more permanent form, appeared is not known, possibly earlier than 1817 and in the same form as the one of that year, pamphlet, but if it exists I failed to find it. The Magazine was edited by Miss Webb's pastor, whose special sympathy with this Society and its Secretary helps us at this point.

Preliminary Progress. The financial feature of the " Female Society " comes to view in the reports of the receipts of the Baptist Missionary Society, which began to appear in the Magazine during this period. Beyond the financial items and the three

addresses sent out by the women, the Magazine gives us nothing except the assurance, in September, 1811, that "the Society has lately received such large additions as to suggest the expediency of dividing it into two branches"; but beyond this nothing more appears until eight years later.

The Magazine began to record the receipts of the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society in September, 1810, with a report for the three preceding months. The first item in this report is sixty-one dollars and fifty-eight cents from the "Boston Female Society for Missionary Purposes" (that is, the Baptist section of it), "per Miss M. Webb." What the women had given during the preceding eight years we know not, except as later statements tell of aggregates from the beginning. But now we find consecutive annual statements as follows: In 1812, fifty dollars; in 1813, twenty-two dollars; in 1814, eighty-three dollars; in 1815, one hundred and thirty dollars; in 1816, one hundred and thirty-one dollars. Of this last entry, eighty-eight dollars "was collected from members of the Second Baptist Church and Society, Boston," meaning probably that this amount was collected from individuals by Miss Webb, with or without assistants, and loosely recorded in connection with the Society's offering. The small amounts here appearing for home missions in 1812, 1813, and 1814, are explained by the fact that in these years the contributions were turned largely to foreign missions, responsive to

the calls from Judson and Rice, this Society being the first in America to make such response in cash.

The Congregationalists started their first missionaries to the East in February, 1812. Simultaneously a campaign occurred in America to secure funds for the Baptist translation work in India. In this Congregationalists shared generously. It is therefore not surprising that the "Female Society" appropriated all its funds, substantially, if not literally, in that year to that work. This was perhaps easier because the majority of the members were Baptists. But also the fact that the Baptists were providing Bibles in Eastern languages for the use of others as well as themselves, was an urgent appeal to others to help. This appeal came to Congregationalists with peculiar power at that juncture. So true was this that the general "Boston Association of Ministers" sent out an appeal, in November, 1811, for the translation work on this ground. The contributions of the women in those years for the Eastern missions were these: In 1812, two hundred dollars; in 1813, one hundred and fifty-nine dollars; in 1814, one hundred and one dollars; in 1815, one hundred and ninety-five dollars; in 1816, one hundred and thirty-one dollars. It is not clear how far these sums came from the Baptist women alone or from both parties. It is quite clear, however, that to some extent, especially in 1812, the original process was reversed, and both parties contributed to the Baptist enterprise. It

may be of interest to record here that in 1815 Luther Rice, in his report to the Baptist General Convention for Foreign Missions, in connection with references to aid from irregular sources, said: "I cannot deny myself the pleasure of recording a grateful testimony to the excellent Boston Female Society for Missionary Purposes. The liberality of this Society toward the foreign mission already displays itself, and will be probably followed by such annual donations as should entitle this praiseworthy Association of Ladies to hold a place among the mission societies which compose the Baptist Missionary Convention."

The Addresses. The most distinctive distinction of this Society historically is its successful endeavor to arouse and combine women in missionary prayer and activity. In this field particularly it was the pioneer and preeminent educator. To this end it expressed itself chiefly through two channels, addresses and correspondence with societies and individuals. The correspondence began earlier than the first address and continued much later than the last one, which was during the period now under consideration. We therefore turn our attention first to the addresses, keeping in mind that the two acted and reacted on each other and combined into a cumulative effect, the continuance of which extended far beyond this period and the quality of which will appear as we proceed.

1. The first address, calling women to a union

in prayer for the increase of the spiritual life and the spread of the gospel universally, was issued under date of February 3, 1812, the same month in which the first missionaries to the East left these shores. It was the first paper of this character ever sent forth. Its call was on the plan of one of the several systems of concerted prayer which had then arisen, proposing the same dates as the general union did, but its peculiarity was that it was issued by women and addressed to women exclusively. That it was despatched with trepidation, in the recognition of the fact that it was an innovation and therefore liable or certain to meet criticism, is evident in it, and in both of its successors the same sensitiveness is evident though modified. At that time women were silent in the churches, and the views prevalent concerning female publicity and leadership were strenuous beyond the easy comprehension of this generation. Even the best informed among us may find it difficult to realize the audacity of this break in the silence, especially by women who were in no sense strident reformers, reckless of the proprieties as defined in the prevalent Christian judgments of the time. They shrank from even the suggestion of immodesty, and were impelled to lead out in this way only by a great conviction of the need of the hour. Their simplicity is manifest in the postscript's solicitation of communications only when they can be had " free of postage." Postage was a problem in those days, and they were not disposed to waste

any money on it. Presumably that correspondence for the most part at least was conveyed in the pockets of occasional travelers. This partly explains the constant announcement of the business house in Boston, which acted as the post-office of the central Society. Having now got ourselves into some sympathy with those women, and some understanding of their situation, we proceed to read the first address, which, on account of its historic significance, we give in full and in the exact form of the original, as it appeared in the "Baptist Magazine" of March, 1812:

"Address of the Female Society, in Boston, to the Female Friends of Zion.

"'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem' is the injunction of the devout psalmist; with the animating promise annexed, 'they shall prosper that love her.' Nor is there a duty more specially enjoined throughout the sacred Scriptures than that of prayer. And the privilege is no less than the duty. Those who live much in the exercise, find 'it is good for them to draw near to God.' But to females the privilege is peculiarly invaluable. Though destined by the Parent of nature to fill more retired stations in life than our brethren, we are nevertheless permitted to repair to a throne of grace (and even to unite in a social manner) to plead for the salvation of sinners, and the prosperity of Zion.

" It affords us much pleasure, to hear from time to time of the constitution of female societies in various parts of the United States, for the purposes of prayer and of aiding missionary exertions. And the Lord, we trust, has condescended to use these institutions as a means of extending the triumphs of the cross.

" The members of the ' Boston Female Society for Missionary Purposes,' believing that a more extensive and particular knowledge and acquaintance with these societies of a similar nature would be promotive of the divine glory and their mutual edification, beg leave to address them through this medium.

" Engaged as we professedly are, dear sisters, in the cause of God, and the pleasing work of endeavoring to advance the spread of the gospel, we have thought that it would add greatly to our happiness could we be indulged the privilege of correspondence with you by letter. We think it would have a tendency to cement us together in the bonds of Christian fellowship, and establish a union never to be dissolved.

" We likewise think it desirable (as far as may be convenient) that we should all hold our meetings on the same day. The idea that many of our dear sisters, in different places, were met at the same time, and engaged in the same delightful employment of praying down blessings on mankind, would tend to strengthen our faith, increase our union, animate our hopes, and cheer our pros-

pects. And we have every reason to believe, that He who has promised to be with two or three who are met in his name; and that if *two* shall *agree* in asking any thing it shall be done for them; would hear our united supplications, if presented in faith. We therefore recommend it to you collectively (and also to our female friends whose local situations may render it impracticable for them to meet together), to set apart the first Monday afternoon of every month, for solemn prayer to God, for the outpouring of his Holy Spirit; a general revival of pure and undefiled religion, and a universal spread of the gospel. Particularly that he will send forth laborers into his harvest, and crown all institutions, which have his glory and the good of souls for their object, with his special blessing. Should we, beloved sisters, engage in this solemn undertaking with our hearts rightly influenced, as the lips of eternal truth and faithfulness have promised 'that they who sow in tears shall reap in joy,' we feel confident that it will not be long before some part of his weary heritage shall experience refreshing showers. How do we know but the favored period foretold by Zechariah is at hand? Zech. 8 : 20, 21, 22: 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts, It shall come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord of hosts: I will go also.'

"Though we sincerely wish to avoid an ostentatious or pharisaical spirit, we honestly confess that we are not ashamed to acknowledge that we *pray*, that we meet in praying circles, and that our heart's desire and prayer to God is, that Israel may be saved. And though we wish ever to preserve our place as females, we can not view it inconsistent with that modesty and shamefacedness enjoined by the apostle, thus openly to come out on the Lord's side. We have the approbation of *good* men of different denominations; we believe that angels smile on our endeavors to communicate the knowledge of salvation to those souls at whose repentance they rejoice. God himself has disposed us to the work, and is engaged in our defense; and if he 'be for us, who can be against us?' Though we may meet the scoffs of an unthinking world, let this only increase our zeal, for more are they that are for us than they that are for them. And while we hear of wars and rumors of wars, and some even of the citizens of our own country are penetrating into the wilderness with the sound of the trumpet and alarm of war; be ours the pleasing privilege (through the medium of the faithful missionary) to resound those joyful strains which once echoed through the plains of Galilee, 'Peace on earth, good will toward men.'

"Dear sisters, permit us to remark, that it will be highly important that we not only pray, but that we 'watch and be sober.' That we be careful not to undo at home what we attempt to do abroad; but

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that we manifest by a uniform life and conversation that we are pilgrims and strangers on earth. Thus when the great Shepherd shall appear we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

"In behalf of the Society,

"MARY WEBB, Sec'y."

"P. S. Should any of the above societies concede to the proposals made by this, they will have the goodness to communicate the information as soon as they have opportunity by conveyance, free of postage. Letters directed to M. W. to the care of Lincoln & Edmands, No. 53, Cornhill, Boston, will be received by the Society, and answered when opportunity presents.

"Boston, February 3, 1812."

2. Within ten months "information" had been received from seventeen societies, one each in New Hampshire and Connecticut, two in Rhode Island, the others in Massachusetts, "of different denominations." This success called forth a second address, longer, stronger, bolder, and in some respects finer. It was addressed to "Females professing godliness," dated December 7, 1812, signed as was the first, and published in the same Magazine, March, 1813.

Its opening reference to its predecessor is followed by this confession: "It was with much trem-

bling and diffidence we took this public step; but from the success which has attended our feeble efforts, we have reason to believe that we were directed to it by unerring wisdom." This communication was in response to the desire of correspondents, who "profess themselves quickened and animated by our exhortation," of some of whom, individuals and societies, the Bostonians had never heard before. They are solicited to continue their correspondence and others are invited "to come forward and participate in those refined enjoyments which result in an enlargement of Christian fellowship." "Allied by the tenderest and strongest of ties, we rejoice to hear of the welfare of any branch of the household of faith, and feel it a privilege to sympathize with those who are in heaviness through manifold temptations. A line from any of our dear sisters scattered in the wilderness would be peculiarly gratifying. We are aware that by thus coming out, we lay ourselves open to the remarks of the enemies of religion; but believing the path of duty to be guarded on the right hand and the left, we feel safe. Our object is not to render ourselves *important,* but *useful.* We have no wish to go out of our province, nor do we undertake to become teachers in Israel; it is our *pleasure* to see our brethren go before, and we are content to glean after the reapers and follow by our earnest prayers their more extensive labors; *this* privilege we *must covet.*"

The vision of the demands of the times next opening to the Secretary, rouses her to write like a prophet: "In a day when iniquity abounds and the love of many is waxing cold; when the most important and fundamental doctrines of the gospel are controverted and held in contempt by many who call themselves Christians; when our beloved country, which has long been the seat of peace, and an asylum for the wretched of every description, is involved in the horrors of war; when the ocean is discolored and the land crimsoned with the blood of our fellow men, it more than ever becomes the real disciples of Jesus to pray without ceasing that the Spirit of the Lord may lift up a standard against those floods of error and infidelity, and cause a reformation of heart and life, both in the church and in the world." They are not to go to war, but to "arise without delay, and besiege a throne of mercy—particularly to bear on our hearts the ministers of the gospel; especially our missionary brethren. When we consider how much wisdom, prudence, faith, patience, and grace they need, to qualify them for the office; how much they need the supports and comforts of religion in their own souls in order to render them faithful to the souls of others . . . we must feel culpable if we are not engaged in holding up their hands. Let us then unitedly plead for them, and though seas may roll, and mountains and valleys intervene between them and us, they will *feel* that their Father's children are praying for them."

Next comes an appeal to extend the hand of charity to those near them: "The embarrassed state of our country may require that we study prudence and economy, but let persevering endeavor to promote the spread of the gospel, by contributing our mite, be the last gratification that we deny ourselves. Yea, let us double our diligence. If our talent be small, if our sphere be contracted, if our circumstances be narrow; let all the energies and abilities we *do* possess be employed in the cause of God. If every Christian considered the support and propagation of the gospel his *first* expense, and measured his others accordingly, what an increase of means would soon be found to disseminate the knowledge of divine truth. Suppose, beloved sisters, we try the experiment," etc.

The closing appeal is for the Bible translation work in India. No man of that time sent out a more rigorous and exalted call to Christian heroism than this frail woman. It was a disheartening time in New England, when men were cast down, but Mary Webb, stirred afresh by the consciousness of a little like-minded company rallying "in the wilderness," in the hamlets and among the hills, knew no fear and was determined that her associates should not falter. This clarion call went forth in an equally stirring setting. The same Magazine contained a survey of Eastern missions, an account of the fire that destroyed the mission publishing house in Serampore, and the letters of Judson

announcing his change of connections and offering himself as the missionary of American Baptists.

3. The third of these documents, the last of which we know, was issued after the close of the war with England, dated March 6, 1815, and published in the Magazine of June following. It carries the caption, "GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT." Referring to the former addresses, it announces success in the effort to bring women into this fellowship far beyond what had been anticipated. It had exchanged letters with "near sixty societies, besides some solitary individuals, who are secretly sighing for the abominations of the land." Its purpose still is to plead the "great cause of missions," now that the return of peace opens the way for free activity. The prospect touches the pen into a poetic strain: "Has the silver trump of PEACE once more been heard? Does the ocean already begin to whiten with canvas, and the peaceful signal wave over the great *highway* of nations? Does the mariner spread his sails, to stretch to the distant poles in the pursuit of gain? Is the faithful missionary waiting, impatiently waiting, to set his foot on the benighted shores of Asia, to unfold the banner of the Prince of Peace and proclaim salvation by grace? Then, dear sisters, let us arise," etc. . . "It is no longer a question whether it is proper for females to serve the church; God has too manifestly owned their labors. And since Miriam and Deborah, Priscilla and Phebe have led the way, it

cannot be dangerous for succeeding professors to follow them. . . We live in an age in which God is doing wonders, and in which all the influences and energies of his people are called for." (The attention is specially directed to heathen lands, and there is no sign of the turning to the city work which occurred a year later.)

The Correspondence. The Boston Female Society for Missionary Purposes did not long stand alone. One composed of Baptist women seems to have arisen in Boston in 1802 or 1803, and others followed elsewhere. The Congregational women rallied to their denominational work simultaneously, though their earlier activity seems to have been less in formal organizations and more through their pastors and churches; but they had "mite societies," locally, at an early date, and the "Cent Institute," sometimes called "Society," as the designation of a general movement gathering up local contributions made under whatever name and plan. The earliest acknowledgment by the American Board of contributions from women with which this writer is acquainted, was in 1802, from the Cent Institute. This plan would provide a channel for the earliest contributions of the original woman's Society, and for its Congregational section after the Baptist members had diverted their gifts into their denominational channels. Manifestly the pioneer Society held a unique position for drawing the women of the two denominations into an undenomi-

national cooperation in prayer and the cultivation of the missionary spirit and knowledge. This fellowship would be free to overflow beyond these two parties as occasion might arise.

How early correspondence began between the Boston Society and others, or unorganized groups or individuals, is not known. All the records of this nature during the first decade, or longer, are in the "Baptist Magazine," from which we have already taken those addresses with which this correspondence was intertwined. About twenty Baptist women's missionary societies, from Maine to South Carolina, are known to have existed prior to the date of the first address, and some communication among them, by personal visitation and direct correspondence, had occurred. Getting started so early and in such a simple way, this correspondence persisted for a long time, possibly not ceasing entirely during the life of the original Society, but the high tide of it appears to have been reached about 1817, in which year the report says: "In answer to a circular to similar societies . . . communications have been received from ninety-seven societies . . . and many more have united in the prayer meeting." The next year's report adds twelve. But the highest number ever claimed, so far as now discoverable, was an aggregate of one hundred and twenty. These items seem to warrant us in finding the golden era of this correspondence about this time. It was in the midst of a great flowering of the missionary

spirit into a multitude of benevolent organizations in Boston and vicinity, more than were able to live long. This necessarily deprived the pioneer of much of its prominence and drew away its constituency more or less. It, however, need not operate unfavorably, but rather otherwise, on the correspondence between societies. As to the individual correspondents not much appears. Mrs. Judson was one of them, though not a member of the Society, so far as known. Several others of the earlier Baptist women who went to the East were members of the Boston Society before leaving this country.

Doctor Stow says that Miss Webb conducted this correspondence. This statement needs modification if taken in application to the whole time. It is almost certain that at first she was the sole force. But she could soon secure excellent helpers, and with the growth of this work, no doubt, she was relieved, more or less, before constitutional provision to that end was made. This, however, appeared in the revised constitution of 1816. It provides a committee of fourteen, including the officers, the whole number being equally divided between the two denominations, to meet monthly for the examination of letters received and written, as well as to transact other business; and individual writers of letters were appointed whose work was inspected by the committee. This suggests the Society's understanding of the magnitude and importance of this

department of its work. The writers were selected, more or less, in view of special adaptations. The only letter of this class that I have seen was that to the Warren, R. I., "Mite Society," in May, 1813. It was written by Mary Bradford, who had acquaintances in Warren, to whom she sent personal messages distinguished from those intended for the Society.

Of responses to these communications from Boston we have three, each with some elements peculiar to itself, the three together giving a quite complete representative view of the whole, perhaps sufficient for the present purpose.

First comes the Warren, R. I., Female Mite Society. It was founded, September 26, 1808, "to assist the missionaries that are, or may be, employed by the missionary society connected with the Association, with which the Baptist church in Warren is, or may be, united." On May 12, 1813, it wrote to the Boston Society: "In compliance with your proposal and request, we . . . have set apart the first Monday, P. M., in each month, for the purpose of prayer and supplication on our feeble endeavors." The letter written by Mary Bradford, just noted, was in reply to this.

The second of the three letters preserved was from the Philadelphia, Pa., Baptist Female Mission Society, dated October 11, 1813. It is of considerable length, and is preserved in a memorial of its author, Mary Hallman, who was Secretary of the

Society. Let her speak for herself: "We have observed, through the medium of the Missionary Magazine, your affectionate and pious address to female missionary societies throughout our beloved America. We have the pleasure to acknowledge ourselves interested in such a communication; and, as we have been, in some measure, urged on by your excellent example, to the formation of our little society, we feel no hesitation in giving you such information respecting our rise and progress, as may be, at any time, necessary or important. . . Before it was known to us that a female missionary society existed, several among us were impressed with the thought of forming such an organization. . . In the year 1810, our blessed Lord in his providence sent among us our mutual friend and brother, Doctor Baldwin, whose zeal in his Master's cause, with the testimony he bore to your missionary exertions, stimulated us to action. While he was exhorting we felt our hearts burn within us to be engaged in so honorable employment. The zealous, laborious, and pious missionaries bearing the standard of the everlasting gospel along the benighted frontier of our highly favored country, claim our sympathies. . . With these feelings, on the ninth of November, 1810, sixteen females assembled in a private room, frequently occupied for purposes of prayer, and where the Master had often met us. At this meeting we were favored with the presence of our respected and beloved brother, Doctor

Staughton, . . and under his auspices we organized. . . We have hitherto considered ourselves as auxiliary to the Philadelphia Baptist Missionary Society. . . The first year we obtained three hundred and thirty subscribers, whose subscriptions, with some donations received, enabled us to pay into the general fund two hundred and forty dollars and eighty-one cents, besides five dollars and forty-four cents collected by a number of little children, whose exertions in the cause of our Lord ought not to be forgotten by us. . . We rejoice to hear that our beloved sisters possess so much missionary zeal. Oh, that we might partake more of the same spirit. . . Oh, that the Sun of righteousness may arise with healing in his beams, the celestial dawn break in upon those who dwell in the region of the shadow of death, and the enlightened nations shine, because their light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon them; that destitute churches by our exertions may be supplied with heavenly manna, and 'drink of the brook in the way.'"

The last of the letters comes from Montville, Conn. It was dated December 29, 1814, and opens with: "Agreeably to your request, the young ladies of Montville have formed themselves into a Society to meet in conjunction with yours; to pray," etc. At once it announces: "Viewing that glorious time now at hand when the spiritual temple is to be built up . . . we have thought the example of the holy women of Israel highly worthy of imita-

tion. We have accordingly contributed our *golden ornaments* to aid in spreading the glorious gospel; and we earnestly entreat 'the daughters of Zion,' and especially our sister societies, to take this subject into serious consideration. We would humbly ask if it is consistent with Christian benevolence to wear those useless ornaments while millions of our fellow creatures are perishing for the word of life?" (This evidently alarmed the editor of the "Baptist Magazine," in which the letter appeared, for he attached to it a note, thus: "As this communication is inserted by particular request, it is devoutly hoped that it may not occasion any unhappy disputing about things of less moment, and thereby divert the mind from weightier matters." From whom the particular request came can be easily guessed, and it is certain that she liked that part of the letter.) The writer proceeds to tell a story of blessing:

"The ways of Zion here had long mourned; we had mourned a *seventy years' captivity,* it being seventy-three years since there had been any general attention to religion in this place; though there had ever from time to time been small additions to the church. Within a few years it has experienced great bereavements from the removal and death of its members; iniquity seemed to abound and the love of many to wax cold, so that the righteous trembled lest the foundations should be destroyed. But oh,

magnify the Lord with us. Instead of saying to us as he did to the church at Laodicea, his language was, *Arise, shine, for thy light has come.* The Sun of righteousness has indeed risen upon us, and at *his* presence the stubborn hearts of his enemies have melted like wax before the sun. . . The Society is small, but the awakening has been very general; it commenced the first of April, 1814, since which time forty have been added to the church, and thirty more give hopeful evidence that they have passed from death to life. . . Dear sisters, can our hands hang down, or our hearts faint, while we witness the reign of the Prince of Peace, and read the promise, which from the signs of the times we have reason to believe is soon to be fulfilled, when his kingdom shall extend from sea to sea, and from the rising to the setting sun?

"In behalf of the Society,

"M. R., *Secretary.*"

The pastor of the Congregational church in Montville kindly examined the church records bearing on the historic statements in this letter. He thought that the letter made the history of the church darker than the records do. He found that seasons of refreshing had come during those seventy years with considerable additions of members. Whatever difference appears between these two reporters is mostly in the point of view. "M. R.," wrote in the enthusiasm of youth, full of the delight of her first

experience of revival and presumably under the impression of the past coming from what she heard from the older Christians; consequently she unconsciously may have seen the awakening of her time as more significant, relatively, than it really was. But the difference between the two views is not serious for any purpose, and especially for the purpose of this work.

THE BOSTON PERIOD
1816-1829

In 1816 the Society began its city mission work, which it continued, and to which chiefly it was devoted, throughout its united life and its Baptist period. At this time it returned nearly to the unity which originally characterized it. For the first two years it had been one, next it had been two in one for fourteen years, now it will continue more closely one for thirteen years, after which it will be entirely two and no more one for twenty-seven years. This statement is general and open to exceptions nearly all the way, as we have seen in the earlier years and will see in the later. Its constitution gave it liberty, which it used from time to time to extend its helping hand where it heard a plea seeming to it the most pertinent and urgent.

Recalling our remark, that the report for 1816 shows an absorbing outward look with no intimation of local enterprise, immediate or remote, we may be surprised to find that in that year the

Society was transformed into a city mission, concentrating substantially its whole endeavor in Boston, where it had done nothing before, and there soon assuming an independence previously unknown by appointing and supporting its own missionaries. It may itself have been unconscious of the radicalness of this transformation, but there the transformation stands distinctly. What caused it?

The answer to this question comes out completely and clearly in the report of 1817. Its summary now made of appropriations from the beginning shows at a glance the original specific, the subsequent expansion, and the new field with its new independence. These are its words: "The purchase of Bibles, Testaments, and other religious books, for distribution by missionaries in destitute places; to home and foreign missions of both denominations; to the translation of the Scriptures into the Oriental languages; and to the support of a mission in this town." Then follows this explanation: "During the past season the attention of the Society has been particularly turned to the state of *our own town.* The multiplied exertions in favor of more distant objects have at length led us to look at home (where charity is usually said to begin)." Attention has been directed to certain classes "whose poverty forbids their appearing decent at public worship," and "who have abandoned themselves to every species of vice." In view of small accommodations "in our houses of worship, free of expense, we have

thought it our duty to try the practicability of a new plan; and have accordingly appropriated the whole income of the year . . . to the support of two missionaries (for a few months as an experiment) to visit and labor with the above descriptions of people." The Baptist women of Rhode Island had preceded it in appointing missionaries.

The report proceeds to consider the problem of "those poor unhappy females who have wandered into the paths of vice and folly." No place or help for them is provided when they wish to reform. The founding of an asylum for them "where they should be suitably employed and the proceeds of their labor go to their support," was considered; but the cost was too great to be undertaken, and the Society "would cheerfully help as far as consistent," if those more able would lead in the enterprise, and a box was provided to receive contributions for this purpose. Appeal was made to other communities to help, in view of what Boston had done for others, and the fact that but a few of these unhappy people were natives of the city. The statement is made that "there are several institutions of this kind in Europe," but the Society seems not to know of any in America. The spirit of the women appears in these words: "To check the torrent of vice, which is flowing with increasing impetuosity, and restore the wanderer to her father's house, must be truly gratifying to the benevolent mind. And if the great Redeemer condescended to notice

and reclaim such characters, his disciples must view it a privilege and an honor to follow his example."

The new alignment, then, contemplated the poor whose poverty separated them from religious associations appreciably, including those whose vices ostracized them still more. The focus of the interest in them was on their rescue from sin. What we now call the "social evil," with those evils that group about it, had become an outstanding shame and peril to Boston. In the language of the Secretary just quoted, the women were aroused "to check the torrent of vice which is flowing with increasing impetuosity." This is strong language from one who used words with discreet restraint. But it was justified by what appears from other sources; for they show that at this time an unprecedented increase of poverty and vice inundated Boston. Manifestly it was a serious task for a society of women, many of them young, to attempt anything in that field, much more serious then than it would be now. How were they to get at it?

First, they employed two ministers as their missionaries. These seem to have sought to touch the various elements in the situation as best they could. One of them, Mr. Davis, "arrived in town and commenced his labors" within a month of the annual meeting. The other, Mr. Rossiter, followed four months later. Both appear to have been called from outside of Boston. Their labors continued "with but little interruption" till the next annual

meeting, when their success resulted in their continuance. Religious meetings and a school had been established among "colored people at the north part of the town," amid very bad conditions, and one woman had been converted. The report observes that "this unfortunate people were introduced into our country by the cruel hand of avarice and barbarity; and if there be a race of human beings which have a right to *demand* our charity, next to the descendants of Abraham, these must have a claim." Acknowledgment is made of a gift of thirty dollars by the "selectmen," from Mr. Abiel Smith's legacy in aid of Africans. The implications seem to be that this was the first work in this field, and that Mr. Smith had left a fund for Negro benefit which was still in the hands of the civil authorities. Mr. Davis had found Southack Street "in horrible condition," and reported that some who had been ensnared into evil ways would reform "if any place could be provided for their accommodation and means for their assistance," encouragement having been given to expect aid on assurances of sincerity of the applicants. He also had labored among the sailors, and writes an ample and able report. Mr. Rossiter's report is in the same vein, and adds that a few women had been rescued by the aid of respectable friends. These reports are followed by "remarks" of the Secretary, consisting chiefly in a reply to objections to the work of the Society on the ground that it is

not necessary because the churches are available. She says that the churches are not sufficient and do not welcome these people, who themselves are not disposed to attend religious meetings. Therefore they must be sought out separately. She uses a simple illustration by way of retort, in which may be detected a note of scorn for the critics. Substantially it is this: If a neighbor's house is on fire, he asleep and half suffocated, "indisposed" to escape, is it not our duty to alarm and persuade him? The Congregational part of the Society had ventured abroad, having sent "Mr. Hubbard, a young man of piety and talents," as a missionary to destitute parts of Virginia, but the enterprise had been thwarted by his death. Reference is made to communications, quite evidently from the Secretary, that had appeared in the city papers during the year, seeking to arouse the public to the moral perils of the community, and acknowledgment is made of personal work and contributions by "respectable brethren." Note is also made of the fact that two of the Baptist members, Mrs. Colman and Mrs. Wheelock, had gone as missionaries to India, "who still remain members of this body," to whom "we have given the parting hand, expecting to see their faces no more in the flesh."

The report of 1818 reaches us only through the "Baptist Magazine" of January, 1819, which combines extracts from the reports of the missionaries and editorial remarks. The editorial part tells

that "between thirty and forty persons are said to have been hopefully converted." This seems to mean among the more respectable poor, for it continues immediately: "Several deluded females have also been induced to abandon their infamous practices, and return to their friends or the places of their former residences." The reports of the missionaries, Davis and Rossiter, are quoted principally in relation to the dissolute women. Mr. Davis tells of one of these from a "respectable family," with the result that "it appears the snare is broken and the young immortal is escaped." Mr. Rossiter tells of the conditions at the center of vice, in West Boston, near the present State House, on the hillside approximately adjacent to Cambridge and Hancock streets. It was known as "The Hill," this term designating the center of the worst life in Boston. The missionary says of it, when reforming effort was first attempted there: "It is impossible for any one not acquainted with the circumstances to imagine, or for me to describe, the awful deeds of darkness which are committed with impunity in that most horrid sink of pollution."

No light from the Society directly falls on the next two years, but the report of 1821 comes to the rescue with a summary of the first five years of the city work, from which some items are gleaned. Six men, besides Andover students, had been employed, for terms "making a total of five years and nine months for one man." One year and

twenty-nine weeks of this time had been occupied by students of Andover Seminary, who served during vacations. Labors had been carried on, not only among the poor and wretched, but in the jail "in this town" and in the Mariners' Hospital in Charlestown. "The efforts of this Society have had their influence" in securing the erection of a workhouse under government control. The Congregational ladies rejoice in a consummation of their former enterprise in Virginia. The fund designed for the missionary who died, had accumulated, and was now applied, with some additions, to "assisting a feeble infant church in Morgantown, Va., in completing their meeting-house." Six years earlier, in 1816, at the inception of the work in the city, Miss Webb had proposed the erection of a building specifically for preaching the gospel to the poor. Some thought the idea chimerical, it was dropped; but when missionaries Davis and Rossiter opened their work, some young ladies pushed it further, a fund was started, the enterprise went into other hands, and now the building was nearing completion. Evidently Miss Webb and a few at least of those like-minded never abandoned the idea, and if her reference to it after the six years has in it a modest note of triumph, we need not be surprised; and we may be gratified as we read these last sentences in her reference to it. "The whole is at the disposal of infinite wisdom and almighty power. It is easy for Him to work with or without means,

and we may safely confide in his mercy and faithfulness."

Having filled out our survey of the first five years of the Society's city mission work, we turn back to bring up the story of the special part which involved the most perplexing problem. Already, in view of this perplexity, we have raised the question, How were they to get at it? This we have partly answered by stating that they sent two judicious ministers into the worst quarter of the city as a part of their field. One might think that that was enough for them to undertake, if indeed they could not be persuaded to let it alone entirely. What they did was this: On the report of their missionaries revealing the need of larger attention to that specialty, they appealed to the good men of the community to come to their aid. What resulted, let another tell in part at least. In 1824, Francis Wayland, then a pastor in Boston and afterward president of Brown University, was secretary of the "Penitent Females' Refuge." In his report of that year he relates: "For many years, it is generally known, there was in the midst of this city a settlement composed of persons, principally females, given up to the practice of every enormity. About eight years since, a highly respectable Society for missionary purposes, composed of ladies of the Baptist and Congregational churches in this city, sent two missionaries into that abode of horrors. In consequence of the report they made, a

large number of gentlemen of piety and benevolence were convened, to whom the question was solemnly put: Cannot something be done to remedy these dreadful evils, especially to reform abandoned women? They, after repeated consultation and much inquiry, deliberately returned the melancholy answer, 'Nothing can be done.'

"The missionaries, however, were sent back to labor, religious meetings were appointed and the gospel was preached. Most of them mocked, but some listened and forsook their courses of sin. Several were returned to their friends. Others were ready to reform, for whom there was no refuge to which they could flee." A building was rented for five years at two hundred and fifty dollars a year, and labor continued "with a good degree of success." "They have shown so clearly the practicability of their plan as to convince gentlemen who have been incredulous, that immense good may in this way be accomplished. They have laid the foundations of the Penitent Females' Refuge strongly in the favor of the public." This "Refuge" Society was incorporated, a larger building was secured by purchase, costing seven thousand five hundred dollars, five thousand dollars borrowed and two thousand five hundred dollars contributed, with seven hundred dollars annually for five years subscribed. The Refuge has received eighty-one and honorably discharged fifty-four, all of whom continue moral and some are pious. This report closes

with an explanation of its purposes and an appeal for aid.

In the same year an article appeared in the "Boston Recorder" (Congregational) as "communicated," the style of which shows with sufficient clearness that Mary Webb was the author. It is an argument against the pessimistic view of this work, drawn from the example of our Saviour and the experience of similar societies. It is also an appeal to any one whose sister or daughter may have been led into error by deception and then abandoned to despair, but to whom "the awful course she had entered was abhorrent," and who was "willing to pursue any respectable means of support," an appeal for aid in meeting the obligations resting on the property of the Refuge.

Four years later, 1828, the report of this same Refuge Society says: "Perhaps no institution for charitable purposes was ever founded under circumstances more discouraging, . . and none whose success calls for more devout aspiration." This is followed by an eloquent tribute to those women whose courageous persistence reversed the judgment of the men and induced them to organize for promoting the work from which they at first recoiled as hopeless. This is signed by Samuel Hubbard, corresponding secretary.

Although we have no reports for the years 1818 and 1819, we are able, with the above materials, to trace the joint movement of the Female Society

and the Refuge through this period. On the first reports of the Female Society touching the need and promise of the work among fallen women, a large company of men came together to consider what more extensive could be done than had been done. These men, after ample deliberation, said that nothing could be done, the enterprise being hopeless. This was probably early in 1817. By persistence in doing the impossible, the women had convinced the men that the impossible was possible so far that in 1818 they organized "The Penitent Females' Refuge," and projected this work on a larger scale with more money. But before this the women had got a footing in the slum field with a mission and refuge house. Now, when a larger building and stronger support had been secured, the originators did what they had formerly proposed, became assistants. As requested by the men, the women cooperated through a committee until an auxiliary society composed of married women was organized in January, 1826. This assault on "The Hill" led to a fierce conflict. Money was provided secretly and offer was made to pay a larger rental than the reformers might offer for any building that they tried to secure. This occurred in 1821 or earlier. But continued success followed, until the whole situation in that neighborhood was changed, and such conditions as characterized it a few years previously did not exist anywhere in Boston. They had been as bad as in any port.

Rev. William Collier was an able and highly esteemed Baptist pastor, whose public service began in 1779. He came from a pastorate in New York City to one in Charlestown, Mass., in 1805. After sixteen years here, serving more or less as chaplain of the State prison and in other charity work, he retired and became the missionary of the woman's Society in 1821. In this position he continued with but little interruption, and sometimes in conjunction with other similar work, until 1838, when on account of physical infirmities he retired, as he supposed, permanently. His report at this time was naturally somewhat reminiscent. From it some of the materials we have used are taken, but we may profitably draw on it for filling out this paragraph. He refers to Saurin's sermon on the penitence of the unchaste woman, as having been printed, or reprinted, by these women for use in this field, proving to be very effective. This seems to have occurred early, possibly before the enlargement of the enterprise. He also makes acknowledgment of cooperation by Congregationalists in a mission society, the two missionaries working together at an early period, more or less. Cordial acknowledgment is also made of the helpfulness of the city government. He draws a striking picture of conditions as he found them at first, and records his admiring gratitude in view of the great success which had been granted, and says: "Whoever may be unacquainted with, or indifferent to, what has been

done in that part of the city by this Society, we cannot be."

In 1825, the Society reported that, on recommendation of a city missionary, it had undertaken the maintenance of a charity school in the north part of the city, " for indigent girls whose age excludes them from the primary schools, and who are suffered to grow up in almost total ignorance of those branches of female education so essential to the comfort and respectability of families." The effort had not succeeded as fully as desired, but it had not been abandoned, and the hope was expressed that " a wise and benevolent public " will appreciate and patronize the plan, " and in the issue establish free schools of this description; and thus complete a system of free school education, already so excellent."

This report presents an appreciation of Dr. Thomas Baldwin who had recently passed away, on which we have already drawn to some extent. Doctor Stow says that this event was one of the greatest sorrows of Miss Webb's life. The report also summarizes items of membership, stating that five hundred have enrolled in these first twenty-five years, fifty-two have deceased, and about two hundred remain, adding this sentence: " It is somewhat remarkable that during the first nine years not a single death occurred; and of the fourteen ladies who constituted the Society, nine are still living, though only four continue their membership."

THE BAPTIST PERIOD
1829-1856

The reason for the division of the Society into two seems to have been solely the hope of a more efficient work in the same field as that previously cultivated by the one. An editorial in the "Baptist Magazine" of January, 1830, states that funds had not been sufficient in recently preceding years to support one man all the time; and it adds: "Of late the friends have become increasingly impressed with the duty of securing the entire time and attention of some faithful minister in this great and important field. Having this in view, the two denominations have recently agreed that in the future they will hold their meetings separately." This is confirmed and clarified by the statement of Miss Webb, in her first annual report under the new order, that "it was agreed to meet separately, with the express desire of attempting such an enlargement as would enable each to support permanently a missionary in this city." This expectation was realized promptly, though not permanently, on the Baptist side. We do not attempt to follow the Congregational sisters, being destitute of data for that purpose, but that they began at least as well as the Baptists seems certain; and evidently Congregational city missions in general, in some years and groups of years subsequent to this time, surpassed, and sometimes greatly surpassed, the Baptist. How

far this difference in general prevailed between the two groups of women of whom we are thinking we do not discover.

Some slight references in early Congregational periodicals may refer to the "Boston Female Society for Missionary Purposes," but none does so clearly, either before or after the denominational division. My search in these publications did not find the name anywhere. Some other explorer may succeed better. This, however, seems doubtful for this reason: In 1913 I corresponded with the Congregational House in Boston, editorial and missionary, asking for light on the name and history of the Congregational part of the Society after the division. The response stated that the investigation there, which no doubt was sympathetic and reasonably thorough, as it certainly was courteous, stated that nothing was discovered on either point. The fact that the Baptist women kept the original name with the word Baptist inserted, suggests that the Congregational women adopted the corresponding course; but if so, the best informed Congregationalists now in Boston have no knowledge concerning it.

The editorial quoted above relates the process of getting the new machine in motion, as follows: "After taking the requisite previous measures, a general invitation was given from all the Baptist pulpits in the city, to the ladies friendly to this

object, to meet at the large lecture-room of the First Baptist Church, on Union Street, the fifteenth of December, 1829. The several pastors were present, and addressed the meeting in the most affectionate and encouraging manner, after which they retired, and the ladies proceeded to take the names of new members, alter a few particulars in their constitution, choose officers, etc. The results were most gratifying; more than one hundred names were added to the list on the spot, each giving two dollars, or more or less, according to their circumstances. There is every encouragement to believe that many more ladies purpose to join the Society. The question whether the entire services of a competent minister may now be obtained is considered settled, and the managers are prayerfully waiting to be directed to the proper person." This makes clear that support had been dwindling, and many women had been holding aloof under the conviction that better results could be secured on the plan now adopted. Rev. William Collier was engaged and began work February 6, 1830. He had been with the union Society for five years, 1821-1826, and now returned for a longer service under the Baptist organization. As has already been indicated, he was eminently equipped for the task.

Twenty-seven years still lie before the Society. For most of them reports of the Secretary and the missionaries, together with editorial references in Baptist periodicals, contribute something to our

purpose. We adopt the simple plan of taking the years in their order and collating from these sources items of interest, avoiding repetitions, and adjusted to the purpose of giving a concise view of the course of events. The years omitted are those which yield no materials under this plan.

1830. The working year was only nine months, in which the missionary had "endeavored to perform an amount of labor equal to three public services on the Lord's Day," preaching in the hall in Milton Street, for the African church, the Penitent Female Refuge, in the primary schoolroom in Ann Street, the House of Correction, and, "in a few instances," in church buildings. He had held "occasional meetings" in different parts of the city; he had visited many vessels, conversing, praying, and distributing tracts among the seamen, "and urged them forward to the temple of the Lord"; he had visited families "in secluded situations," for conversation and prayer, this last a few times with the Congregational missionary, "finding, as expressed in Scripture, that two are better than one"; he had led neighborhood meetings for prayer among the neglected, maintained afternoon Bible class and evening preaching among the Negroes, family worship at the Female Refuge, and an evening "biblical exercise" there, with "literary instruction," preaching in Peck Lane, and praying in the Marine Hospital. Some of these services were continual, others intermittent, and still others only

occasional. He had recorded three hundred visits where he expected to call again, but he did not know how many others. He had given special attention to children and young persons, in relation to Sunday-schools, Bible classes, and week-day schools. In these last fields he acknowledged the "efficient aid of the Priscilla Society, established for the express purpose of . . . furnishing needful articles of clothing, to enable the poor to attend public worship and Sabbath-schools," auxiliary to the woman's Society. He had also inaugurated a religious reading-room for Lord's Day mornings. In some of these enterprises he had been much aided by voluntary assistants of both sexes.

The secretary's report for this year tells that more than two hundred members had been enrolled since the preceding December, making more than three hundred additions during the preceding twelve months. But she holds that a larger support is necessary if the hope of an adequate success is to be realized. Her ideal is a missionary supported by every church. She meets inquiries about fuller details of success by pointing out that much of the work being done cannot be judiciously published, as it can be by foreign missionaries among a remote people. Recalling the previous correspondence with other societies, she announces its continuance and gives directions to promote it.

1832. "We hail" a missionary provided by the Baptist "Evangelical Society" to work with Mr.

Collier. "To see our brethren coming up to the help of the Lord against the mighty is encouraging." Gifts of "self-denial in dress" and jewelry reported, some anonymous.

1833. "Nothing peculiarly new or striking." Five members have died, among them Mrs. Dr. Howard Malcom, wife of an eminent minister. The death is recorded of Mr. Ensign Lincoln, a wise friend of the Society from its origin, "and not only did he afford his advice, but his assistance also by his prayers and donations, and *gratuitously* printed its first constitution." "Once during the year we have had the pleasure of receiving at our place of meeting the much loved Society with which for so long a time we were happily connected." Here appears the first formal treasurer's report available. It shows receipts from one "life subscription," "various friends," committee collections in all the Baptist churches, "Female Tract Society," annual subscriptions, and the "Executors of Mrs. E. H. Jones." Total, six hundred and twenty-five dollars and twenty cents. Mrs. Jones had been a missionary in India, and "this was bequeathed by her will, which she left in that country. That received two years since from her was in articles she brought with her when returning to America." The amount here recorded from the executors was fifty dollars, which "assisted in commencing our course of operations another year." Was not this the first home mission legacy from Asia?

1834. Eight members died this year, several in early life. But one was "our venerable and highly endeared friend, Madame Grew, the oldest member of this Society, and one who united not long after its organization." She was in her seventy-seventh year. "Although she resided out of the State more than twenty years, she retained her membership and regularly transmitted her subscription, as she did to various other societies in the city." She was constant in attendance when practicable, and "at the meeting preceding her decease her place was filled, and those who were present will not soon forget the humble boldness and fervor of her supplications at a throne of grace." Mrs. Wayland, wife of the president of Brown University, was another of those mourned this year. She was the first life-member to pass away. The cry of the children had been long recognized by the Society, but hitherto adequate means with which to respond had not appeared. Now, however, "a variety of providences" flowing together made what before had been impracticable, to "appear comparatively easy." The "Children's Friend Society was formed in less than two months after our last annual meeting, and will be fairly recognized as the legitimate offspring of city missionary operations. A house is open, and twenty-one children have been admitted under its hospitable roof."

1836. Preaching has been less than usual on account of inadequate places for meeting, but much

work has been done by the active missionary from house to house, "in the abodes of poverty, vice, and wretchedness," where the missionary "feels perfectly at home." His attention has turned particularly to the promotion of memorizing passages of Scripture in the various institutions touched by him, a system of general interest at that time. He had distributed a hundred copies of the "Christian Watchman," a Baptist weekly paper, "among the shipping and small craft in our harbor." The secretary urges the importance of more spiritual results, in harmony with which preaching had been instituted in the western part of the city, J. N. Parker, of the Newton Theological Institute, preaching and visiting there for several months.

1837. A legacy of five hundred dollars is reported from Mrs. N. R. Cobb, which relieved the year from special soliciting and left a balance in the treasury. One of the seven members who had died had not "enjoyed an evidence that she was prepared to meet God." This induced an appeal to those "who are assisting to send the gospel to others while they do not themselves embrace it with their whole hearts." One of the seven was Mrs. Heman Lincoln, long a valuable member and manager. Two members had "been sent far hence to bear the tidings of salvation to the ears of the Greek and the barbarian, and we should be grateful for the loan of such members, that we may have the privilege of giving them to Him when he is

pleased to call them to work in his vineyard." Mention is made of the decease of Mr. Samuel Ganch, "the tract man," with appreciation of his diligent helpfulness in that field of service.

1838. Missionary Collier resigned on account of increasing years and feebleness, but was continued with more privilege of relaxation. Anticipating entire retirement, he made his report, the only source we have for this year, largely reminiscent in those parts now available, and from it we have already taken substantially all of it. One passage, however, relating to an early stage of the conflict with the vicious elements, may be fitly placed here. He wrote: "Often have the tears gushed into my eyes as I have thought of the benevolent zeal of a lady of the first respectability, as one day I said to her, 'We may as well retire from the work,' she, with a countenance filled with anguish, in view of the scene around us, exclaimed, 'They are my sisters, and I must have them.' We persevered, and by the help of your missionary, upon one occasion, she snatched a child as a brand from the burning, ordered a carriage, and took it herself to South Boston."

1839. The continuance of the missionary, which seemed to be demanded by his great hold on the poor and the vicious, was accomplished, on a reduced salary, by special gifts from some of the ladies and men of the Baldwin Place Church, and others.

1840. Naturally the fortieth anniversary was utilized by the secretary for historical purposes. Consequently much of its material has been used in earlier connections. But one item may be of interest, the recent decease of Doctor Emmons, whose sermon struck the spark, the flame from which we are contemplating. He reached the great age of ninety-six years. Reviewing the whole period, the secretary rejoices in "the happy conversion of quite a number who joined while in an unrenewed state."

1842. "The Society would gratefully record the goodness of God in preserving it such a length of time in great harmony and sisterly affection. It is composed of members from the Baptist churches and congregations in the city, and forms an interesting bond of union between them." So says an editorial in the "Christian Watchman," which contains a report of the missionary's work, now greatly reduced by serious illness. But his support continues.

1845. Here appears for the first time a "Board of City Missions," whose missionary is "Rev. Mr. Howe." This Board holds a joint meeting with the Baptist Woman's Society, whose missionary is "Rev. Mr. Caswell." At the meeting Doctor Stow preached and Doctor Sharp spoke. The house was "crowded to overflowing" and the meeting highly interesting. Whether this "Board of City Missions" had any connection with the "Evangelical

Society" mentioned in 1832, or was a more recent organization, does not appear, but both were Baptist and in cooperation in these years with the Baptist Woman's Society for Missionary Purposes.

1846. Missionary Caswell's salary has been increased from three hundred dollars to five hundred dollars. He was invited to repeat his report at the City Mission Society's meeting, at which time a contribution was made for the women's work. The report is largely obituary, especially referring to Miss Doubt (one of the founders), and from it we have already taken information concerning her. Reference is made to "a short interview enjoyed at our meeting in July last, with the highly honored and useful Elder Judson," to whose aid "this Society contributed while organization for foreign missions was in its incipient stages." Having observed his course for thirty-three years, they now welcomed "himself and his companion" with great gratification.

1847. Missionary Caswell has been much engaged in relieving the needy, especially sufferers from the sea and from fires in the city. Funds from various sources have been committed to him for this purpose, amounting to two thousand and ninety-nine dollars. This service has been accompanied by religious work, but preaching has been reduced because of lack of places for meeting.

1850. Mr. Caswell continues missionary in about the same fields, visiting a thousand destitute families

and using funds from various sources. He calls attention to rapid changes, old residents giving place to foreigners, who now are one-third of the population. "A very large portion of the thirty thousand who have landed in our city from Europe during the twelve months past are now beggars and vagrants in our midst." The gospel must be carried to them. He has found homes for children of these vagrants in country towns, and proposes that a house be secured for the use of five hundred such on the way to the country.

1852. The same missionary and processes are still in view, but the formerly proposed facilities seem not to have been secured. The secretary laments inability to meet the missionary's salary, and asks, "What shall be done?" She has been prostrated by illness. Tried helpers have passed away, one of them being Mrs. Ward Jackson, a member over forty years, more than half of that time a manager. "In various other institutions Mrs. J—— will long be remembered. Of the Fragment Society in this city she was the *mother* . . . associated with a few pure-minded, sympathetic Christian females, she was one of the founders of the Fatherless and Widows Society, and labored assiduously as one of its trustees for a score of years." She was a teacher from its beginning in the first Baptist Sunday-school in Boston, in the Charles Street Church, 1816. "The last sixteen years of her life she was persevering as one of the Board of the Children's

Friend Society. In the abodes of the poor, and at the bedsides of the sick and dying, she was a frequent and welcome visitor." Miss Webb is now seventy-two years of age, her former helpers nearly all gone, her "ever-dear Society" in financial straits, she saying that this may be her last report (as indeed it was the last for us), and yet she closes in this strain: "It becomes us to reflect for a moment on the goodness of God to this Society during all its continuance. Repeatedly has he permitted us to share in the shedding down of his holy influences, and to witness the conversions of souls. . . The poor and suffering have in thousands of instances been relieved and encouraged, and the hearts of widows and orphans been made to sing for joy. True, our pecuniary prospects have sometimes been darkened, but again the clouds have disappeared, and light has shone upon our path. The divine command is, 'Trust ye in the Lord forever.'"

1856. This was the year of the disappearance of the "Boston Baptist Female Society for Missionary Purposes." In the three preceding years we have no communication from it. But in 1854 the "Watchman and Reflector" contained an editorial on "City Missions," in which it "laments Baptist neglect in comparison with the good work of the Congregationalists," saying that we have but one missionary while they have twenty, and the funds for his support have not been secured. It asks, "Will the city churches abandon an enterprise so noble and

Christlike?" and declares that prompt and energetic action is demanded. The preferable interpretation of the editor's reference to the one Baptist missionary in Boston, in 1854, seems to be that he was Mr. Caswell. If this is correct, the City Mission had collapsed or suspended. But possibly, in writing of denominational work, he thought it not necessary to mention the women whose status was generally known, and his reference is to another.

However that may be, the "Watchman and Reflector" in 1856 published the last report of the Woman's Society through its missionary, Mr. Caswell. It carries a tone of despair. He had been in this service for twelve years, which he reviews; one item being that the total received and distributed by him had been two thousand and sixty-four dollars and forty-two cents, and then he summarizes the whole as if he felt that the end was at hand, but he indicates once more the pressing needs, and does not say that he is done, closing with these words: "Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. We are assured that Christ, the great missionary from heaven, went about doing good in alleviating human misery." This is accompanied by an editorial note: "We are sorry to learn that it is feared the Society will not be able to support Mr. Caswell another year. A large number of destitute widows and families, many of them too among the Baptist household of faith, will be sufferers should our brother be withdrawn from their

service. We hope this will not be. Are there not devoted females in our churches . . . who are willing to sustain this Society by taking the places of the devoted ones formerly connected with it, whom God has called to their reward above?"

While we may regret that the Society disappears so obscurely, such disappearance is not surprising. Soon after its origin the rising tide of charitable and missionary interest expressed itself in an excessive multitude of similar organizations, only a part of which survived the competition that was inevitable. The romance of the original increasingly ceased to appeal to the young, who had reasons for enlistment elsewhere among women, and the financial aid of men was also drawn away. Miss Webb's personality undoubtedly explains its continuance in its later years, and with her retirement its sustenance failed, to her great grief.

III

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND ENTERPRISES

Turning now from the Boston Female Society for Missionary Purposes, we follow Miss Webb into other organizations of charitable and missionary character, some of which were denominational, but others not.

1. The Female Cent Society in Boston. Doctor Baldwin preached the annual sermon before the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society in May, 1804. In it he said: "From two female societies, composed chiefly of young women, one hundred and thirty-two dollars and eighty-four cents have been received. One of these societies is called the *Cent Society*, that sum being the weekly subscription of each member." More definite information concerning the constituency of this body is not at hand, but as soon as the receipts of the Massachusetts Baptist Society began to appear in the Magazine, they included this Cent Society as a contributor, and it continued to appear in this connection from September, 1810, to January, 1823, Miss Webb being always recorded as the custodian of its funds. Only one conclusion seems possible, which is, that

not later than 1803, Baptist women founded this Society as auxiliary to the general denominational organization in Massachusetts. If we assume that she held the same relation to its finances that she held to those of the original woman's organization, the assumption seems to be necessary; and if we proceed to assume that she held a corresponding relation to its origin, we meet with no resistance in any record. The strong probability is that she was intimately concerned in its inception. It cannot be accounted for reasonably except as a Baptist institution, probably composed jointly of some Baptist women in the Society for Missionary Purposes and others not so connected. The lighter financial requirement, one-quarter of the other, looks to the enlistment of a larger number of Baptist women than were in the older one. Granting these things, we have here the first Baptist woman's missionary society in America, with Miss Webb its treasurer and possibly chief founder and worker. Usually the other brought in more money for Baptist missions than this one did, though not always. The Magazine of September, 1811, says editorially that up to that time the Massachusetts Baptist Society had received from the Baptist part of the Boston Female Society four hundred and sixty-four dollars and forty cents, and from the Cent Society three hundred and fifty-five dollars and seventy-seven cents. Except in the last year of this period, both seem to have given all their funds to the one cause.

2. The Children's Cent Society. Running parallel with the two contributions from the Baptist women, and brought in by the same person all the time, gifts from a children's society appear. It is recorded as a "society" first in 1811, but in 1810 record appears of ten dollars and eighty-nine cents "from children." These were almost certainly the same, whether formally organized in the earlier year or not; therefore we may assume at least that this Children's Cent Society originated not later than 1810, and that it had been instituted by Mary Webb. As we explore a little farther, however, we seem compelled to carry the origin of this movement among the children still farther back, on this ground: An editorial note in the Magazine of September, 1811, credits the Children's Cent Society with fifty-six dollars, presumably from its origin. But the total assigned to it for 1810 and 1811 is only thirty-seven dollars and eighty-nine cents. This leaves eighteen dollars and eleven cents to have come in prior to 1810. If we allow the children to have given before that year about as they gave in it, this eighteen dollars and eleven cents, not mentioned elsewhere, carried the first of their contributions back two years farther, 1808. And if they had given less in preceding years than in 1810, the origin of their movement is pushed still farther back again, to 1807 or beyond. This was the first children's missionary society in America, so far as I know; and taking into consideration the

sentiments of the time, both with reference to children and missions, it is safe to regard it as the first until evidence to the contrary appears. The total credited to the children in the seven years, from 1810 to 1817, was one hundred and sixty-three dollars and forty-three cents.

But we are not yet quite done with these youngsters. Wedged into the middle of a paragraph, in the original secretary's book of the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society, is a modest sentence giving us another view of them as pioneers in another style of missionary enterprise now universally prevalent. This, under date of May 29, 1817, is the sentence: "Read letter from M. Webb, requesting that the money contributed from the children's mite society be devoted to Sunday-schools in some destitute parts." The amount was twenty-four dollars. It was designated to Sunday-school missions. The Sunday-school was then barely born in America, the first Baptist in Boston originating about nine months earlier. Probably a Sunday-school missionary society had not even been imagined; this Baptist society had nothing of that nature in its plans; nevertheless here is this contribution from these children asking that it be appropriated in aid of needy Sunday-schools. This seems to have been the primal note of the whole conception of contributions from Sunday-schools, or any other organizations of children, in aid of Sunday-schools. The record gives no intimation of

what was done with this money. Probably the Board was bothered by it, although it is not probable that "M. Webb" did this without the knowledge of one of its members, her pastor, unless she wished to surprise him. That in this item lay an advanced conception of Sunday-school missions is evident. How its author moved as a Sunday-school worker in her own church is next to be considered.

3. The Sunday-school. The first Baptist Sunday-school in Boston was begun in June, 1816, in the Charles Street Church; the second one a month later. It was for girls only, as was its predecessor in Charles Street. The men of Baldwin Place opened one for boys the next spring. These two were kept separate for twelve years. From a history of this church we quote: "A large number of the ladies of the church and congregation, with the approval of the venerable and beloved pastor and the brethren, organized themselves into a society, agreeing each to pay one cent a week for the support of the school. At that period there were no primary schools in Boston. The Sabbath-schools were established exclusively for the children of the poor. Clothing suitable for their attendance on public worship had to be provided for them. This was taken charge of during the week by a lady appointed by the society as keeper of the wardrobe. It was the duty of the teachers to instruct the scholars, if necessary, from the alphabet; also to teach them to

read and spell, as well as to require them to commit to memory and recite portions of Scripture, Baldwin's Catechism, hymns, etc. The hours for opening the school in the summer were 8 a. m. and 1 p. m.

"On a delightful morning, July 27, 1810, says one who witnessed the scene, the school was commenced with thirty-seven children, attired in neat habiliments, provided and made up by the industry of the society. It met on the floor of the meeting-house. . . The pastor being at that time in rather feeble health, Deacon J. C. Rainsford . . . implored in earnest prayer the divine blessing. . . The first class of colored children ever brought under Sabbath-school instruction in Boston was taught in this school." The society was officered by six managers, a secretary, a treasurer, and a keeper of the wardrobe. It seems that these had nothing to do directly with conducting the school; for this others were designated: three directresses—first, second, and assistant. Mary Webb was the "first directress." That is, she was the first officer in the government and instruction of the school, the superintendent, as we now say, so far as that term was applicable to any one. Her sister, Mrs. Hart, with whom she lived, was the first keeper of the wardrobe, which was doubtless kept in her house.

This society did not confine its benefactions, in the wardrobe line, to this school, but more or less sent them abroad. This is shown by the record

that it gave clothing, valued at three dollars, to the Carey Indian Mission in 1824. This mission was in Michigan, and the Boston Baptist Female Society and the Children's Society contributed to it at the same time with the Sunday-school Society.

4. The Corban Society, instituted in 1811 and incorporated in 1816, was composed of women in Boston. Its purpose was to aid candidates for the gospel ministry. Its aid was restricted to those who "are orthodox according to the Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism, and who are recommended by some minister of the Congregational or Presbyterian order." Membership was conditioned by moral character, friendliness to the Shorter Catechism, and the annual payment of two dollars. For a Baptist student its aid seems to have been very improbable, if not impossible. But in 1817 Mary Webb was an annual subscriber, and one of the eight assistant directors. How long she had been, or continued, in either of these relations is not known.

5. "The Fragment Society," instituted in 1812 and incorporated in 1816, designed "to assist in clothing the destitute, more especially destitute children, and to loan bedding and infants' garments to such mothers as are not able to procure things necessary for their comfort during the period of their confinement." It was quite evidently undenominational, but its "mother," Mrs. Jackson, was a Baptist (see the 1852 items of the Baptist Society

for Missionary Purposes), and at an early date three prominent Baptist women—Mrs. Doctor Baldwin, Mrs. Heman Lincoln, and Miss Mary Webb—were members.

6. The Fatherless and Widows Society is mentioned by a personal correspondent as one of those that were "thought of and born in Mary Webb's little room."

7. "The Children's Friend Society had its beginning in her room, and was designed to care for the babies of working mothers, during the hours of that servitude. Ladies—my grandmother was one of them—would have their days of going to the North End, and, in a small room at first, take the babies, keep them clean and happy and well fed, while the mothers were out washing or housecleaning." The author of this statement does not wish her name in print, but she is a competent witness. We have modern instances of care for the children of mothers who depend on such aid in order to attend worship, but Mary Webb long ago rallied women of leisure to a more arduous service for the poorer women, with her own little room as the original base of operations.

Another friend, at the age of eighty-six, writes: "I recall one evening my mother sent me to tell Mrs. Burns to keep a little girl till they could find a home for her, which led to the formation of the Children's Friend Society, and Miss Webb became the secretary." These two reporters seem to

produce a contradiction concerning the cause or occasion of the origin of the society. But this is not necessarily so; the two may have cooperated in the initial influence; and at the worst we have only a slip of memory touching a detail on the part of one of them.

Fortunately, as an aid in clearing this little cloud, we have an early document printed by the Society itself. It states that the organization occurred December 4, 1833, and the incorporation March 25, 1834. It further says that such an organization had been contemplated for considerable time by individuals, who hesitated because so many charitable institutions were appealing to the public. But none of those existing met the needs of children who had lost one parent, and whose remaining parent was not able to provide. This society proposed to come to the rescue in such cases, provided that the child be surrendered to the control of the society while in its care, to be educated by it, industrially and otherwise, and "religious instruction shall be considered of primary importance." The incorporators were Ann Lee, Margaret D. Baldwin, Susan D. Reynolds, and Mary Webb. Most of these certainly, and all of them probably, were Baptists. The meeting at which the constitution was adopted was in "the lecture-room of Rev. Mr. Malcom's meeting-house" (Baptist). Membership was open to both sexes, at two dollars annually for adults and one for children, life-membership twenty-

five dollars. Control was by a board of lady managers, and Mary Webb was secretary.

The probability seems to be that the meeting of ladies to care for the children of working women made opportunity for the discussion of the other form of helpfulness closely allied, with doubts about its practicability, and that a specific case of a child that must be cared for by some one crystallized the discussion into action.

8. Missions to the Jews. Recall that in 1818 Miss Webb's plea for the Negroes in Boston recognized them as having first claim on Christian effort "next to the descendants of Abraham." Her sentiment here was not solitary. At that time and earlier, as well as later, the Hebrews were subjects of the helpful sympathy of Christians. Societies were instituted in this interest specifically. I have not seen a direct statement that Miss Webb was a member of one of these, but other evidence that she was is available. In 1840 two dollars reached the Baptist General Convention, "per Miss M. W.," from "a late member of the Boston Female Jews Society," and designated for "American Indians." This locates a Jews society in Boston and seems to mean that a recently deceased member of it had left these dollars in care of Miss Webb for the Indians through this channel. In the next year the same custodian delivered to the same convention, for the same purpose, seven dollars and twenty-five cents, from the "Chelmsford Female Jews Society,

Mrs. Sarah Osgood, treasurer." Here was a Jews society outside of Boston, whose treasurer used Miss Webb as channel for transmitting to the convention a fund for use among the Indians, this society having previously sent money the same way directly. This is something of a "mix up." For us now, in connection with the foregoing, it indicates the good standing of our subject as a working friend of the Jews, as well as an all-around missionary collector and distributor.

9. Individual and Voluntary. The place held by Miss Webb in this period of her life, extending indefinitely backward and forward, as an individual and voluntary solicitor and custodian of aid for good causes may be sufficiently indicated already. But other items of the same character are not lacking in the meager and scattering records of that time. We noted that in 1816 more than half of the funds coming to the Baptist Missionary Society through her hands was from members of the church with which she was connected, though not of the Society of which she was the treasurer, suggesting that it was secured by her personal solicitation. In 1836 Baptist receipts for foreign missions contain this item, "a friend, to be appropriated expressly for the benefit of schools in Africa, per Miss M. Webb, thirty dollars." In 1837 this comes: "Last tribute to Burman mission, of an aged member of Second Baptist Church, per Miss M. Webb, ten dollars." Other items might be added.

IV

EVENTIDE AND NIGHTFALL

Almost nothing is known of the closing years of Miss Webb's life. Doctor Stow gives a general statement of gradual physical decline, accompanied by sustained interest in those institutions to which her active life had been devoted, and with a special service of sympathy and advice for those active in the service which was often sought and freely given. Others contribute incidents confirming this general statement of spiritual interest sustained to the close and illustrating it. But not much comes into view touching dates in connection with the decline of physical powers or her confinement to the house. The time of the incident soon to be related is placed by the writer at seven or eight years before the end, at which time Miss Webb was "very feeble" and needing company through the night. Whether that illness was permanent is not intimated. In her own report at the fifty-second annual meeting she said: "Your unworthy secretary and treasurer has again been prostrated by illness, and although measurably restored, yet increased infirmity and advancing years indicate that she too must shortly lay down those offices to which you have

successively elected her, and which she has delighted (though so feebly) to fulfil for more than half a century. This may be the last communication of this kind that shall drop from her hand." This was four years before the death of the Society and nine years before her own departure.

A letter in response to a published inquiry for information is such that it may better be given in full and left to carry its own impression:

"Reading in the 'Watchman' your article regarding Miss Mary Webb, a flood of memories and recollections of long-ago days passed through my mind, and filled my heart anew with praise and gratitude. I may not be able to furnish anything that may be of use, or available in your memorial, but I feel moved to write a few lines. I was baptized into the same old Baldwin Place Church in January, 1854. Miss Webb was then very feeble and needing some one to be with her at night, so it was suggested to me, as a young Christian wanting to do some slight service for the Master, to watch with her half of the night. I had never seen her face very clearly until then, although I had watched the wheeling of her little white, chairlike vehicle down Salem Street to the door of the church, and noted the eager readiness of the young men to assist in bearing her into the church building. She impressed me as being very small of stature, with a placid, loving face full of gentle kindliness. Special features I cannot recall over these many

years, for I was then a young girl scarcely sixteen, and am now a white-haired old lady of sixty-six. After making her comfortable on this occasion of my half-night with her, I sat by the window looking upon the stars and thinking. I felt a weight of responsibility, for this was my first service of this nature. Suddenly her gentle voice broke the stillness with the quietly spoken words, 'My dear, will you pray?' Oh, I can feel now the throb of my heart. I had never prayed with or before another, was not accustomed to the *sound* of my voice, for I had prayed to my Father in secret; but there was something in that sweet, compelling voice I could not refuse. I knelt. The Lord was there, undoubtedly hearing the inward, silent petition of his aged saint for me, the young, ignorant girl, but I trust his own child. That night was a mile-stone in my Christian journey, and I have felt that dear Miss Webb purposely helped me to this service, that my mouth might be opened unto the Lord for future usefulness. I have been and am a very unprofitable child of the King, but if I have ever helped another by 'prayer and supplication,' I think my first inspiration came from that humble room, kneeling there by the bedside of one of the Lord's own saints. I feel I have wearied you and do not know that any thing I have written will at all serve your purpose, but it has been a pleasure and helpful to me thus to recall this night of the long ago."

The writer of the above secured from another an account of a similar surprise given by Miss Webb to a visitor: "A gentleman who was not a member of the church, but who often visited her, was asked by her to pray. He was perplexed, but knelt and offered the Lord's Prayer."

Another correspondent writes: "I used to hear a great deal about her and remember her death, for she was considered a saint by those who knew her—an uncanonized one, but worthy to be. . . My grandmother always said that Mary Webb, from her wheeled chair, brought forth more good to the needy than any other *one* woman in Boston."

Some other sentences from "Rambles in Old Boston," perhaps may be appositely inserted here: "Many of the former generation can remember her little hand carriage, covered with green baize, in which she had herself wheeled about town on her errands of kindness to the needy and suffering. Such an example could not fail to inspire others with her spirit of devotion; and the enterprises which she began in feebleness grew to large proportions by the generous support of the Christian public. . . The case is somewhat like that of Anna Gurney. . . The life of neither Mary Webb nor Anna Gurney has ever been written, and the two probably never heard of each other; but their trials and their triumphs were singularly alike."

Turning again to Doctor Stow's tribute we find this: "In the later years of her life, though she

seldom went abroad except to the sanctuary of worship, she saw much Christian society at her house, and was the admiration of every visitor for her cheerful piety and her serene confidence in the Rock of her trust." He states that she read good books, especially the Bible, with which she was very familiar; and he adds, after some statements concerning her activity in certain charities: "But growing infirmities admonished her, and she became content to work by influencing such as she saw to go on with every good work. . . Her decline was gradual; her mind was peaceful. . . Nothing but sin troubled her." And he closes thus: "The foregoing is a meager sketch of one who was worthy of a better memorial. But though much might have been written, especially with respect to her inner life, yet the record could not have been briefer without a culpable neglect of one who eminently honored the Christian profession. Mary Webb was a gem of precious worth among the stones of Zion, and she now glows in the Saviour's diadem of beauty. The most prominent lesson of her life is the amount of service possible in the face of discouraging circumstances. She did more good than a stranger to her spirit could have supposed possible. Though physically weak and almost helpless, she would always be doing something."

The "Watchman and Reflector" of May 30, 1861, contained a brief editorial notice of her departure, pronouncing her "invariably an ornament

of the Christian profession," and promising to furnish later a fuller account of her life. This appeared in the issue of August twenty-ninth next following, and was signed "S." We have used it in several connections, attributing it to Dr. Baron Stow. His delay in performing the service asked by the editor probably resulted from his absence.

Mary Webb died on May 24, 1861, at 26 Hull Street, where she had lived with her sister since the death of her mother in 1813. The city records show that her death was caused by cancer of the breast, and that she was interred in Woodlawn Cemetery. There she lies side by side with her sister "Sally." The mounds above the graves are of the same length, and with the plain stones at their heads are twins in appearance. The writer of this reverently copied from one of these stones the following words, preserved here in the same arrangement which they have there:

Mary Webb
daughter of
Samuel & Margaret
Webb,
born March 12, 1779,
died May 24, 1861.

She was one of the originators of the first female Missionary Society ever established of which she was the faithful treasurer for fifty-six years.

Thus it appears that the full number of the days of her earthly pilgrimage was eighty-two years, two months, and twelve days. It is recorded that in 1854 only five of those who had united with the church before her remained, and these all had come in not later than 1793, six years preceding her. Therefore the strong probability is that on her departure she left no member who had been in the fellowship of the church as long as she had.

At noon on the Lord's Day, May 26, 1861, her funeral occurred in the house of worship of the Baldwin Place Baptist Church. This funeral, at the close of the morning church meeting, was not wholly exceptional at that time, such arrangement being then customary to some extent. Sixty-two years, ten months, and twenty-six days before she had been borne into the same place and buried in the symbolic tomb.

Quite evidently not many who had witnessed her burial in the baptistery were now present. The conditions were not favorable to such attention to the last tributes to this remarkable life as would have been fitting. For a long time she had been shut in from the notice of the public, and one so situated passes out of the thoughts of those who do not see the "shut-in" with startling rapidity. In the fields in which she had once been so much a pioneer, a solitary toiler, and an admired leader, known at every turn of the town, many effective workers were gathered in many organizations that

had lived while her "ever-dear Society" had failed with the failing of her strength, and died five years earlier than her own decease. Besides this, it was at the opening of the Civil War, when, as the papers, religious as well as others, show, all minds were engrossed with the impending national conflict, already begun indeed, and charged with its great excitement. But still we may safely assume that in the Baldwin Place meeting-house that Sunday morning gray heads from all directions, some of them not accustomed to be there, might have been seen; of those who amid the din of the strife and the lapse of the years had not forgotten the former days, and whose hearts were still stirred with the old loyalty to the life now come to its rest. But with it all, very quietly, obscurely, and as the world goes, appropriately, the exhausted form was borne to the rest that it had won.

But the imagination may be permitted to entertain the thought that nature was less unmindful of the deeper proprieties of the scene than were some who might appropriately have given more heed to her going away. For the behavior of the elements appear to have been adjusted to a fitting symbolism of her life. The local press preserved a record of the weather which we appropriate to our own use. "The day," it says, "was one of the finest as well as the warmest days of the season. Copious showers the previous evening laid the dust and cleared the air. At sunrise the thermometer stood

at fifty-seven degrees; at noon, seventy-four. A brief shower fell about twelve o'clock." May we not trace a parallel, if not a symbolism, a fitness in the face of nature as so recorded, to the course and the culmination of the earthly experience and exit of Mary Webb. The heat and dust of the day through which she rested in the casket may symbolize the heat and dust of her long life of toil and pain; the refreshing rain of its evening the crowning of that life with peace and fruitfulness; and the brief shower at the noon hour of the final parting of her face from the eyes of earth may token to us the gentle graciousness and the fructifying power of her spirit while here and of her influence when gone.

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